DAVID BOWIE ⚡ LED ZEPPELIN

HOUSES OF THE HOLY
50th ANNIVERSARY

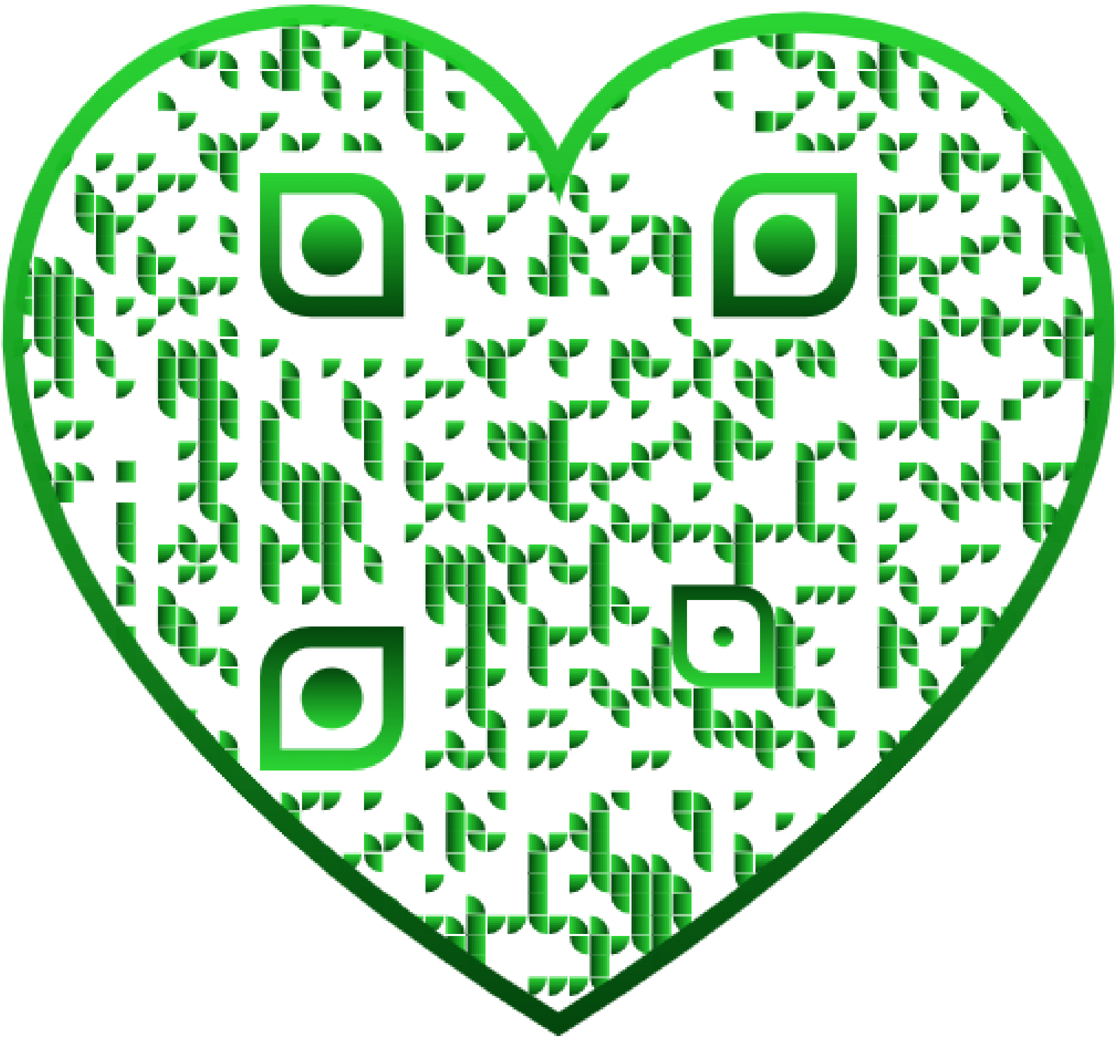
CLASSIC ROCK

THE MAKING OF MACHINE HEAD

DEEP PURPLE CATCH FIRE!

Plus!
THE BEATLES
DAVID CROSBY
ROBERT FRIPP
THE ANSWER
WHEN STEVE HILLAGE MET STEVE DAVIS!
& More!

FUTURE
ISSUE 312



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Contents

APRIL 2023 ISSUE 312

26
Led Zeppelin
"We were buccaneer musicians, ready to try anything. *Houses Of The Holy* was the result."

GETTY

8 The Dirt
Ozzy Osbourne announces no more tours; Mick Fleetwood says Fleetwood Mac are "done"... Welcome back Delain, Don Powell and The Hold Steady. Say hello to Hillbilly Vegas and Laura Cox. Say goodbye to Tom Verlaine, Van Conner, Barrett Srong, Anthony 'Top' Topham...

20 The Stories Behind The Songs
Jellyfish

22 Q&A
Robert Fripp

24 Six Things You Need To Know About...
Empyre

26 Led Zeppelin
The making of *Houses Of The Holy*, the album that signposted the way forward for a band now operating at their peak.

38 The Answer
Back from hiatus with new album *Sundowners*, and hoping to soon be bathing in the warm glow of success.

44 David Crosby
We look back at the life and times of the man whose music was part of the glittering soundtrack to a golden era.

52 David Bowie
For David Bowie in 1983, art rock and clown suits were in the past – this is the story of *Let's Dance*.

Cover Feature
56 Deep Purple
Had Montreux Casino not burned down at the time, there would be no *Smoke On The Water*. And no *Machine Head* album as we know it.

64 The Hot List
We look at some of the essential new rock tracks you need to hear and the artists to have on your radar. This month they include Rival Sons, Fantastic Negrito, The Cold Stares, Robert Jon & The Wreck, Crown Lands, The Heavy, Arielle and more...

73 Reviews
New albums from Måneskin, Roger Waters, The Answer, The Winery Dogs, The Long Ryders, Fantastic Negrito, Delain... Reissues from Genesis, Mötley Crüe, The Strokes, Motörhead, 10cc, The Auteurs, Bernie Marsden, Ten Years After, Trapeze... DVDs, films and books on Alice Cooper, Nik Turner, Holly Knight, Tears For Fears, Carole King... Live reviews of Black Stone Cherry, The Darkness, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Dropkick Murphys...

88 Buyer's Guide
Queensrÿche

91 Live
We preview tours by Steve Hillage and Blackberry Smoke. Plus gig listings – find out who's playing where and when.

106 The Soundtrack Of My Life
Steel Panther

SUBSCRIBE AND GET A FREE GIFT p80

JOE BONAMASSA
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INTERNATIONAL CENTRE
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How many times does a freak accident change the course of hard rock history? Not all that often, I'd wager. But had a suspended ceiling in a Swiss casino not caught fire, then Deep Purple's sixth studio album would have been a very different beast altogether. I'm referring, of course, to *Machine Head*, and its signature song *Smoke On The Water*. From page 56, discover the inside story on the making of a true classic, in the band's own words.

This month marks the 50th birthday of Led Zeppelin's fifth album, so we're celebrating it this issue. I mean, how on earth did they try to follow up *Led Zeppelin IV*? Turn to page 26 to find out...

We also talk to The Answer (p38), who return with a new album after a seven-year hiatus; we venture behind the scenes of the making of David Bowie's *Let's Dance* album (p52); sit down for a chat with Robert Fripp (p22); we pay tribute to the late, great David Crosby (p44), who passed away just after we'd gone to print with our last issue; and there's much, much more for you to get stuck into.

Until next month...

Siân Llewellyn, Editor

THE COVER: HEILEMANN / CAMERA PRESS

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This month's contributors

SAM WILLIAMS
Sam is one half of creative studio Magictorch. Based in Brighton, Magictorch began life in 1999 and have been keeping busy with illustration, motion design, design and all things in between ever since. Introduced to the mighty Led Zep from an early age, Sam was more than happy to try on a Hipgnosis hat for our feature opener (p27)! Check out magictorch.com for more of their work.

PAUL BRANNIGAN
For this issue Paul spoke to fellow County Down men The Answer about their comeback album *Sundowners* (p38). Paul has written books on Metallica, Eddie Van Halen, Dave Grohl and Lemmy, and recommends you spend this month's pocket money on *Supercluster* by Therapy? frontman Andy Cairns's new group JAAW, or Eliza Clark's second novel *Penance*.

SIMON HARPER
Upon hearing the sad news that David Crosby had died, we asked Simon – who'd spoken with Crosby for *CR* last year – if he'd like to pay tribute in this issue (p44). The founder of *Clash* magazine, we learned, was in the midst of a deep mourning period, having immersed himself in all things Croz, celebrating the glorious canon of work left behind. Simon said yes without hesitation. His favourite Croz song is *Déjà Vu*.

Classic Rock

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FIXATION   GWAR   HOT MILK   INGESTED   NOVA TWINS   PUP
PUPIL SLICER   SMASH INTO PIECES   STAND ATLANTIC
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Macca Shares 'Lost' Beatles Photos

Exhibition opens in June with his 1960s images. And Beatles-related artworks posted on Castle Fine Arts blog. Macca also shares Jeff Beck collaboration.

Above: The crowds chasing us in *A Hard Day's Night* were based on moments like this. Taken out of the back of our car on West 58th, crossing the Avenue Of The Americas. © 1964 Paul McCartney

Left: John and George. Paris, 1964 © 1964 Paul McCartney

Below: Self-portraits in a mirror. Paris, 1964. © 1964 Paul McCartney

Right: Images from the Castle Fine Art exhibition: (top to bottom) **Beatles 1** by John McCormack **John Lennon Red Gold** by Ronnie Wood **Lennon and McCartney** by Bisaillon Brothers **George Harrison** by Stuart McAlpine Miller

UNSEEN PHOTOS OF The Beatles, shot by Paul McCartney between December 1963 and February 1964, are to go on show at the National Portrait Gallery in London when it reopens this summer.

Paul McCartney Photographs 1963-64: Eyes Of The Storm will run from June 28 to October 1, 2023. McCartney thought the photos in question had been lost, before he rediscovered them in 2020.

The gallery's director, Nicholas Cullinan, tells *The Guardian* that the photos will offer a "uniquely personal perspective on what it was like to be a Beatle" at the height of Beatlemania. "The photographs taken in this period captured the very moment that John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr were propelled from being the most popular band in Britain to an international cultural phenomenon, from gigs in Liverpool and London to performing on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in New York to a TV audience of 73 million."

At a time when so many camera lenses were on the band, these photographs will share fresh insight into their experiences, all through the eyes of Sir Paul McCartney."

If you can't make it to London for the exhibition, then don't worry because McCartney will publish the photos in a book, *1964: Eyes Of The Storm*, via Penguin to coincide with his upcoming 81st birthday on June 13. The 275 images featured in the collection were taken on a 35mm camera in New York, Washington DC, Miami, London, Liverpool and Paris.

In a statement, McCartney explains: "Anyone who rediscovers a personal relic or family treasure is instantly flooded with memories and emotions, which then trigger associations buried in the haze of time.

"This was exactly my experience in seeing these photos, all taken over an intense three-month period of travel, culminating in February 1964. It was a wonderful sensation to be plunged right back. Here was my own record of our first huge trip, a photographic journal of The Beatles in six cities, beginning in Liverpool and London, followed by Paris [where John and I had been ordinary hitchhikers three years before], and then what we regarded as the big time, our first visit as a group to America."

Situated in St Martin's Place in Central London, the National Portrait Gallery has been closed for a £35 million refurbishment since 2020, and finally reopens on June 22, with McCartney's exhibition its first major attraction. Admission is free for members and patrons of the National Portrait Gallery, and tickets can be bought from npg.org.uk or by telephoning 0207 306 0055.

To coincide with the exhibition, Castle Fine Arts have posted a blog featuring their Beatle-related art. The collection of originals includes works by the Bisaillon Brothers, who have created several works including the band in their Abbey Road period, and an interpretation of van Eyck's Arnolfini Marriage with the couple in the original replaced by John Lennon and Yoko Ono. Rolling Stone Ronnie Wood has also painted Lennon, and Stuart McAlpine Miller has painted George Harrison. For details go to www.castlefineart.com/blog/hidden-gems.

Meanwhile, McCartney has shared a 30-year-old previously unreleased musical collaboration with the late, great Jeff Beck, recorded in 1994 when the two English music legends were working on a campaign for vegetarianism. Iconic guitarist Beck passed away on January 10, following a short battle with bacterial meningitis.

Known as *Why Are They Cutting Down The Rainforest?* the collaboration features a spoken-word contribution from Beck concerning deforestation and its environmental consequences. The message was included in a 13-part series, titled *Oobu Joobu*, created and presented by McCartney for American radio in 1994.

McCartney says: "With the sad passing of Jeff Beck – a good friend of mine, and a great, great guitar player – it reminded me of the time we worked together many years ago on a campaign for vegetarianism. It's great guitar playing, cos it's Jeff!"

McCartney's team has posted the collaboration on the former Beatle's Meat Free Monday website. He launched the campaign, alongside his daughters Mary and Stella, in 2009 to encourage people to think about the difference they can make to the planet by having at least one meat-free day a week. Beck's 1994 message highlights the damage caused by deforestation done in order create more land for cattle grazing, as well as some of the harmful knock-on effects. **DL**

The National Portrait Gallery exhibition opens on June 28 (www.npg.org.uk).

This month The Dirt was compiled by Mark Beaumont, Stephen Dalton,Bill DeMain, Lee Dorrian, Polly Glass, Dave Ling, David Mead, Henry Yates

RIP

Thank you... and good night.

Lisa Marie Presley

February 1, 1968 – January 12, 2023

Singer and actor Lisa Marie Presley, the daughter of Elvis Presley, has passed away at the age of 54 due to a cardiac arrest. Lisa Marie, who released three albums between 2003 and 2012, married (and divorced) Michael Jackson and then Nicolas Cage and was involved in many charity and humanitarian projects. At her memorial service, an emotional Axl Rose performed a solo piano rendition of Guns N' Roses' song *November Rain*.

Floyd Sneed

November 22, 1942 – January 27, 2023

The drummer who played with Three Dog Night in the 60s and 70s has died at the age of 80. Canadian Floyd Sneed was the only black man in Three Dog Night, who enjoyed 21 *Billboard* Top 40 hits. A post at the group's Facebook page said "Floyd broke many barriers both musically and culturally," and described him as "a wonderful human being, a complete original and a sweetheart of a man."

Dean Daughtry

September 8, 1946 – January 26, 2023

The members of the Atlanta Rhythm Section are mourning their co-founding pianist after he passed away aged 76. A social media post from the Georgia-based southern band said of Dean Daughtry: "For 49 years Dean never missed a gig until his health forced him to retire a couple of years ago, cutting short his goal of 50 years. He was like a bulldog."

Bruce Gowers

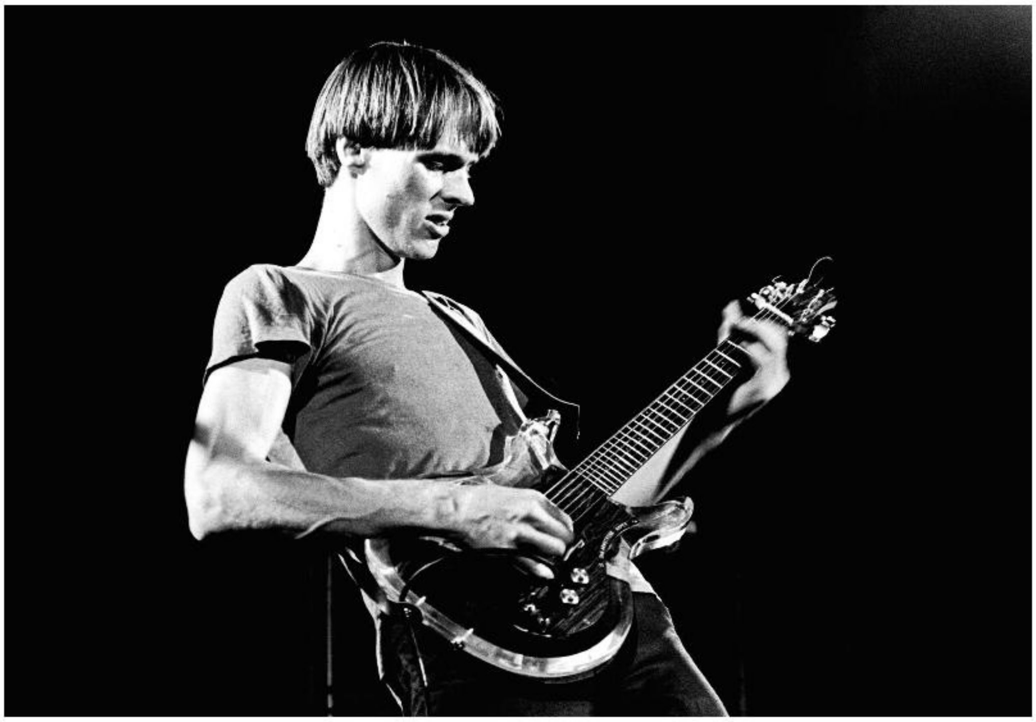
December 21, 1940 – January 15, 2023

Sir Brian May has led the tributes to the man who directed the ground-breaking promo for Queen's classic song *Bohemian Rhapsody*, stating: "Bruce was, of course, the architect of our video, and quite a few others as well." Gowers also worked with the Rolling Stones, Michael Jackson and more. He was 82 years old when he died following an acute respiratory infection.

Yukihiro Takahashi

June 6, 1952 – January 11, 2023

The lead vocalist, drummer and a co-founder of Yellow Magic Orchestra, who also guested on albums by Ryuichi Sakamoto, Bill Nelson and more, Yukihiro Takahashi was a trailblazer for electronic music from the 1970s onwards. He was 70 when died of a brain tumour. An online tribute from Sparks said: "We are saddened to hear about the passing of Yukihiro Takahashi. It was an honour to cross paths on occasion throughout the years."



Tom Verlaine

December 13, 1949 – January 28, 2023

Television singer and guitarist Tom Verlaine has died peacefully in New York City at the age of 73 following a short illness.

Verlaine was born Thomas Miller in Denville, New Jersey. He adopted his stage name as a tribute to the French poet Paul Verlaine. Verlaine and his school friend Richard Hell formed Television in 1973 from the ashes of their previous band Neon Boys, and they became regular performers at legendary club CBGB. Their first album, 1977's *Marquee Moon*, which reached No.28 in the UK, is considered to be among the masterpieces of new wave. Last year, *Classic Rock* readers voted it one of the best debut albums of all time.

Television followed *Marquee Moon* with 1978's *Adventure*, but then split that same year, after which Verlaine launched what became a successful solo career. Television re-formed in 1992 and released their self-titled third, and final, studio album.

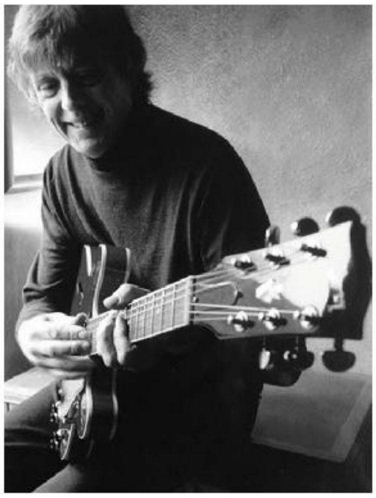
Verlaine was once in a relationship with Patti Smith and they worked together many times. "There was no one like Tom," Smith wrote in *The New Yorker* magazine. "He possessed the child's gift of transforming a drop of water into a poem that somehow begat music."

Red Hot Chili Peppers bassist Flea tweeted: "[I] listened to *Marquee Moon* 1000 times. And I mean LISTENED, sitting still, lights down low taking it all in. Awe and wonder every time. Will listen 1000 more. Tom Verlaine is one of the greatest rock musicians ever. He affected the way John [Frusciante, Chili Pepper guitarist] and I play immeasurably. Fly on Tom."

Mike Scott of The Waterboys also paid tribute, writing in a social media post: "Tom Verlaine has passed over to the beyond that his guitar playing always hinted at. He was the best rock and roll guitarist of all time, and like Hendrix could dance from the spheres of the cosmos to garage rock. That takes a special greatness." **SL/DL**

Anthony 'Top' Topham

July 3, 1947 – January 23, 2023



Anthony 'Top' Topham, the first guitarist with The Yardbirds, has lost a battle with dementia just two weeks after the death of one of his successors in that band, Jeff Beck. Topham was 75 years old when he passed away while surrounded by family.

Born in Southall, just outside of London, Topham formed the pioneering British blues-rock band with singer Keith Relf, guitarist Chris Dreja bassist Paul Samwell-Smith and drummer Jim McCarty in May 1963, but under pressure from his parents – he was only 15 at the time – left five months later and was replaced by Eric Clapton.

After leaving The Yardbirds, Topham played as a session musician and worked with Peter Green and Christine McVie, and in 1970 released his solo album *Ascension Heights*.

After a period of ill health, he entered the fine arts business and became an accomplished interior designer and painter. He joined the Indonesian spiritual movement Sudbud, and changed his name to Sanderson Rasjid.

He had a second spell with The Yardbirds between 2013 and '15, when he replaced Dreja.

Looking back on his original exit from The band, he once said: "Later on, I didn't regret leaving, because they'd moved away from the blues music that I was interested in." **DL**

TOM VERLAINE: GETTY; ANTHONY 'TOP' TOPHAM: PRIVATE COLLECTION

Van Conner

March 17, 1967 – January 17, 2023

The founding bassist and songwriter with Seattle band the Screaming Trees has died of pneumonia at the age of 55. The news was confirmed by his brother Gary Lee Conner, who was the band's guitarist, who described his brother as "one of the closest friends I ever had".

Van Conner was born in Apple Valley, California, and formed his first band, Explosive Generation, with Gary Lee and drummer Mark Pickerel, after hearing Black Flag's *Damaged* while at high school in Ellensburg, Washington. They evolved into the Screaming Trees when singer Mark Lanegan joined in 1985.

Their debut album *Clairvoyance* was released via local label Velvetone Records the following year, after which the band signed to renowned indie label SST and recorded the underground classic *Even If And Especially When*. After two more albums for SST, they moved to Seattle to join the burgeoning grunge scene, joined Epic Records and released *Buzz Factory*.

"Soundgarden were the only other [Seattle scene] band signed to a major when we got picked up," Van told *Classic Rock* in 2012. "I think Alice In Chains were getting their deal at about the same time as us."

He played on every subsequent studio release from the group, including *Uncle Anesthesia* (1991), *Sweet Oblivion* ('92) – which included *Nearly Lost You*, a standout on the soundtrack to the film *Singles* – and *Dust* ('96).

Conner developed a side-project, Solomon Grundy – named after the DC Comics supervillain – during his time with the Screaming Trees, and played with several other bands after the Trees went on hiatus, including Gardener, Valis and Musk Ox. He also toured with Dinosaur Jr in 1990.

Dinosaur Jr tweeted: "We will miss Van Conner, shit. I'm gonna listen to his LP [the Solomon Gundy album]. I suggest you do the same, and think about what an awesome person he was." **FL**

Barrett Strong

February 5, 1941 – January 28, 2023

GETTY x2

The co-composer of some of the best-loved songs in popular music, Barrett Strong has died of undisclosed cause. He was 81 years old. Along with writing partner Norman Whitfeld, who passed in 2008, Strong wrote a string of timeless hits that include *Money (That's What I Want)*, *I Heard It Through The Grapevine*, *Papa Was A Rollin' Stone*, *War* and *Wherever I Lay My Hat (That's My Home)*. Those and other Strong and Whitfield songs were recorded by The Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, Jerry Lee Lewis, Marvin Gaye, The Temptations, Gladys Knight & The Pips and many more.

Berry Gordy, whose company Motown Records handed the duo their big break, commented: "Barrett was not only a great singer and piano player, but he, along with his writing partner Norman Whitfield, created an incredible body of work."

Strong was born in West Point, Mississippi, and later moved to Detroit, the home of Motown. After his name was removed from the credits for *Money (That's What I Want)*, Gordy claiming to have written the song himself, he spent years fighting the label for his share of the song's royalties.

In 2013, Strong observed that his work would "outlive" him, adding: "Once you're gone, those songs will still be playing." **DL**

Frank Wyatt

Died January 10, 2023

Frank Wyatt was the keyboard player, saxophonist and flautist over two spells with the Virginia-based progressive rockers Happy The Man. During the 70s he appeared on their two cult albums *Happy The Man* and *Crafty Hands*, and returned for a reunion in 2000. He died after having waged a prolonged battle with kidney cancer.

Alan Darby

Died January 25, 2023

Geoffrey Downes and Neil Murray led the tributes to popular guitarist and session player Alan Darby, who toured with Eric Clapton, Van Morrison, Robert Palmer, Bonnie Tyler and many more. "Alan was a great and talented musician and one of our former Asia guitarists," said Downes, while Murray added: "Alan played guitar for too many people to mention, and alongside me for 12 years in the Queen musical *We Will Rock You*."

Brian Cassar

March 21, 1936 – December 25, 2022

Despite having been born in Newcastle, Brian Cassar was an early Merseybeat group singer and guitarist. Formed in May 1959, his band Cass And The Cassanovas were early rivals of The Beatles in Liverpool. Eric Clapton was in the group Casey Jones And The Engineers with him in the early 60s. Cassar died at his home in Germany on Christmas Day. He was 86.

Paul Fox

May 22, 1954 – December 25, 2022

As well as carving out a career as a musician, playing keyboards with Rod Stewart, Mötley Crüe, the Pointer Sisters and more, Paul Fox worked as a record producer, making albums and singles with the likes of XTC, Phish and Gene Loves Jezebel. For the past decade he had suffered from early-onset Alzheimer's disease, which he was diagnosed with in 2012. Fox was 68 years old.

Renée Geyer

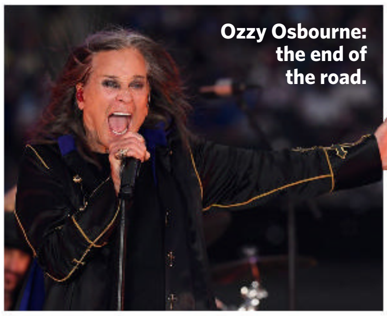
September 11, 1953 – January 17, 2023

Born in Melbourne, Renée Geyer went on to become an icon of Australian music. She had a distinctive voice, which she once memorably described as "a white Hungarian Jew from Australia sounding like a sixty-five-year-old black man from Alabama". In addition to her own material, she also sang on records by Sting, Joe Cocker and Neil Diamond. Geyer was 69 when she died from complications following an operation for lung cancer.

Gary Smith

March 28, 1958 - January 16, 2023

Rhode Island native Smith started out as an advisor to Throwing Muses before becoming an influential record producer who worked with Pixies, Juliana Hatfield, Billy Bragg and 10,000 Maniacs, among others. Smith was 64 years old when he died of cancer.



Ozzy Retires From Touring

Although he will try to continue to perform live.

Ozzy Osbourne has announced a retirement from touring. After injury, various illnesses and multiple postponements, the 74-year-old former Black Sabbath frontman has called a halt to going on the road, and cancelled a run of dates due to begin in Finland in May. Ticket refunds for the cancelled dates are available at point of purchase.

Ozzy was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease in 2003 but it wasn't announced publicly until 2020. Last year he underwent major surgery to remove and realign pins in his neck and back.

"This is one of the hardest things I've ever had to share with my loyal fans," Ozzy wrote in an emotional social media post. "Four years ago this month I had a major accident, where I damaged my spine. My one and only purpose during this time has been to get back on stage. My singing voice is fine. However, after three operations, stem cell treatments, endless physical therapy sessions, and most recently groundbreaking cybernics (HAL) treatment, my body is still physically weak."

He continued: "I have now come to the realisation that I'm not physically capable of doing my upcoming European/UK tour dates, as I know I couldn't deal with the travel required. Believe me when I say that the thought of disappointing my fans really fucks me up, more than you will ever know.

"Never would I have imagined that my touring days would have ended this way. My team is currently coming up with ideas for where I will be able to perform without having to travel from city to city and country to country.

"I want to thank my family, my band, my crew, my long-time friends, Judas Priest, and of course my fans for their endless dedication, loyalty, and support, and for giving me the life that I never ever dreamed I would have."

Ozzy signed off with his traditional message: "I love you all."

The tour's intended special guests, Judas Priest, were quick to voice sympathy over the predicament of their old friend, and also stated an intention to hit the road as headliners as soon as possible. Due largely to uncertainty over their commitments with Ozzy, Priest are yet to tour fully in support of their 2018 album *Firepower*.

"We send all our love and support for Ozzy and thank our fans in the UK and Ireland especially for your loyalty by standing with us," said the group, adding: "Right now we're looking at feasible opportunities to see each other again soon and will post updates accordingly." **DL**

NEWS

Mick Fleetwood says that **Fleetwood Mac** are "done" following the death of Christine McVie last November. Talking at the Grammy Awards, Mac's drummer speculated that any future prospects for the band were "sort of unthinkable right now".

Twisted Sister played live for the first time since the band's farewell tour six years ago when they performed three songs during their induction to the Metal Hall Of Fame. Raven, Lou Gramm and Chris Impelitteri were also honoured at the event.

Despite Neal Schon and Jonathan Cain's ongoing feud, **Journey** played in Oklahoma on January 27, their first show of 2023. The band continue to sue and counter-sue over alleged misappropriation of finances, and bicker about political issues, but the show rolls on.

Public Image Ltd will not be representing Ireland at Eurovision 2023. On a televised show, John Lydon and company lost out to Wild Youth with their song *We Are One*, decided by a combination of public vote, international jury and a national jury.

Thunder singer **Danny Bowes** (pictured) had to re-learn to walk again following a serious head injury six months ago. Returning to his show on Planet Rock Radio, Bowes reassured listeners: "It's been an endless round of hospital, rehab and physio. I'm not in the shape. I won't be performing any time soon, but my voice has come back."

WELCOME BACK

Don Powell

The former Slade drummer on being scared of Ginger Baker, stage invaders, and Ozzy madness with Maiden.

As the engine room of the 1970s' most riotous live band, Don Powell's steady drum beats kept Slade on the rails. But his departure left a nasty taste – he claims guitarist Dave Hill fired him via email in 2020. With his new venture Don & The Dreamers, the drummer applies his ageless groove to a covers album of rock'n'roll benchmarks.

What are your memories of making the new album, *It's Never Too Late To Be A Rock Star*?
It was so easy to do. It reminded me of the old days, when you just went in and recorded. But I had to get used to going straight to computer; no tape machines any more. I'm still of the old school. My stepson Andreas calls me a boring old fart from the Stone Age!

> "My stepson calls me a boring old fart from the Stone Age!"

At this point, what's your motivation to keep making music?
I still get a kick out of playing drums. I've met quite a few musicians where it's almost like a chore for them to get on stage or in the studio. I've always said, from day one, when I stop enjoying it I'll get out.

With the cover of *Crossroads* on the album, were you channelling Robert Johnson, or Cream?
A bit of both. I remember in [early band] The 'N Betweens we played with Cream. In those days there were no separate dressing rooms, so there we were with Eric Clapton, Ginger Baker and Jack Bruce – and also on that bill was Robert Plant. Ginger had his Ludwig kit set up and nobody could move. He looked like a mad viking, so everybody was scared to ask him. I'll always remember Robert Plant going up and saying: "Er, Mr Baker, would you mind moving your kit?" He just stared at him and said: "Fuck off." And he did!

You live in Denmark these days. Were Slade big there, and are they still?
We were. According to my wife, there's always been a competition here between us and Sweet. She says you were either a Slade fan or a Sweet fan – and they never spoke to each other. When I first moved here, I did a few lectures at local schools. It's funny, the first question everyone always asked was: "Do you know Ozzy Osbourne?" The kids have all got their own bands, and I used to get up and jam. I remember we did *Hey Joe*, and this fourteen-year-old turned round to me and said: "You're a great drummer for an old man".

What's your favourite memory of first setting out with Slade?
It was riotous. In the early days there was always someone in the crowd who wanted to get up and sing. And they were dreadful. But you couldn't say no because they looked like a brick shithouse. I remember we used to play this pub on the outskirts of Wolverhampton, and this guy was always out of his brain on beer. He'd sing, then jump off the stage and the crowd would catch him. After a while they got fed up, and one time he did his bit, dived off the stage – and the crowd parted. He hit the floor! But that was normal.

So, do you know Ozzy Osbourne?
Yes! One time, Iron Maiden were on at the Hammersmith Odeon, and it was arranged that Ozzy was going to sing *Paranoid* – but he wanted to go to a fancy-dress place first. And what does he put on? A ballerina's outfit. Pink tights and little tutu. And he goes on stage and the place just goes mental. **HY**

It's Never Too Late To Be A Rock Star is released in March.

OZZY: GETTY

> **"We make real music for real music people, and that's it."**

★ HIGH HOPES

Hillbilly Vegas

Say hi to the latest new-to-Britain southern rockers. Just don't call them the new Skynyrd.

Since Blackberry Smoke first came to the UK a decade ago, several southern rock bands popular in continental Europe – including Whiskey Myers, The Cadillac Three and, more recently, Robert Jon & The Wreck – have looked to gain a foothold in the UK, with varying degrees of success. The latest hopefuls are five-piece Hillbilly Vegas, who last year made their British debut with a showcase in London to promote their good-time shit-kicking record *The Great Southern Hustle*.

Hillbilly Vegas started out as a bunch of Oklahoma-based schoolmates before becoming a group in 2011.

"My grandmother, a big fan of gospel music, passed away, and I got some friends together to record a gospel song as a present for my mother," explains singer and guitarist Steve Harris. "We didn't mean for it to happen, but it did: put musicians in a room together, and eventually they'll start a band."

Since then, a rootsy yet distinctly song-friendly sound has led the Hillbillies to gigs with the likes of Molly Hatchet, Black Stone Cherry and the Kentucky Headhunters, as well as country-based artists such as Travis Tritt, David Allen Coe and Blake Shelton. "Nothing is original, every band copies its influences whether we sound like them or not," Harris offers. "We're a band from the South and we play music that comes from the South."

Harris is horrified to learn that one over-enthusiastic British critic hailed his band as "the new Lynyrd Skynyrd". "Oh man, that's terrible," he says, grimacing. "Skynyrd were trailblazers. They didn't care if people called them southern rock, they were *rock*. And if a comparison exists between the two bands, then that's what it is."

The Great Southern Hustle is actually a reworked collection of the best parts of the band's previous two albums, *Ringo Manor* and *'76* (released in 2011 and '16 respectively), and its irresistible lead-off single *High Time For A Good Time* dates back to the latter. "Ten of the twelve tracks have been out in America but a couple are brand new," Harris clarifies, "and they were all re-recorded."

Last November the band played their UK debut, at The Troubadour in London, which brought a slew of rave reviews.

"Being on that stage [where Hendrix and Dylan had played], there was such a sense of history," Harris says. "I was hoping that the audience would get what it is that we do, and they did. Now we can't wait to come back. We're begun working on a new album and really hope to add the UK to the places we play regularly."

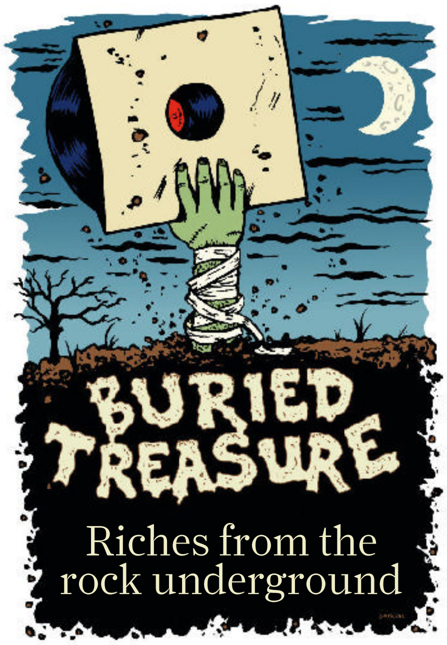
Is there a message or political agenda?

"None at all," he says, laughing at the suggestion. "I don't think that just because you have a platform it should be used to impose those beliefs. No. We make real music for real music people, and that's it." **DL**

The Great Southern Hustle is out now via Conquest Music.

FOR FANS OF...

"Any time that we're compared with Lynyrd Skynyrd or The Black Crowes or a band of similar ilk, that's so exciting," says Steve Harris. "Skynyrd were very diverse, they had songs like *I Know A Little* and *That Smell*. Our albums also go from bluesy hard rock to country, but we're not a hippie jam band, we write radio songs."



DALTON

Riflessioni Idea D'infinito, 1973, Music Superstereo De Luxe, Italy. £2,500.

Dalton were a heavy prog band from Italy, who were active from '72 to '79, and released two albums and two singles. *Riflessioni Idea D'infinito*, their debut album, is a much-coveted rarity, having been initially released only in small quantities. At a time when the progressive scene in Italy was bursting with talented artists and releases, it was inevitable that many would go under the radar. Dalton were seemingly one of those, despite their longevity and obvious talent.

Dalton's bluesy hard-rock style had elements of Sabbath and Heep, and classical and folk leanings. Although very much a progressive album, it doesn't stray too far down the mind-boggling avenues of technicality often associated with many Italian proggers of the period. Instead they deliver competent tunes, enhanced by use of Mellotron and Moog synthesiser, giving the music an

'Elements of Sabbath and Heep, and classical and folk leanings.'

otherworldly feel. The use of flute may draw comparisons to Tull and Focus, but ultimately they maintain their own sense of identity. Vocals are shared between all five band members, who often harmonise. Opener *Idea D'Infinito* is perhaps the most typical track on the album, combining all elements previously mentioned. *Riflessioni* is a more upbeat instrumental, while *Um Bambino, Un Uomo, Un Vecchio* is a lighter baroque-pop affair with harpsichord and piano, and *Dimensione Lavoro* is goodtime boogie-prog.

With a running time of 28-minutes and songs averaging around the four-minute mark, the album certainly isn't drawn out, and is enjoyable from start to finish. **LD**

NEWS

According to *Billboard*, **Elton John**'s farewell tour is officially the highest-earning tour of all time. Having commenced in September 2018 and due to end on July 8, it has so far grossed a staggering $818 million (£664 million). Elton's final UK show will be headlining the Sunday at this year's Glastonbury Festival.

Phil Mogg is recovering well from a heart attack that caused the cancellation of a farewell tour for UFO. The 74-year-old singer revealed: "I have been yodelling at Brighton Electric Studios and finishing up some tunes for a Moggish [solo] album, an eccentric collection of songs that will be in my spring collection and which will put some lead in your pencil. Ho ho!"

Ronnie Romero has revealed that after internet criticism of his performances as the singer with Blackmore's Rainbow he contemplated taking of his own life not once but twice. "I was paying too much attention to what people were [saying] about me," he admits. "From that point, I needed to release a little bit on social media."

As a prequel to this summer's symphonic tour (see page 100 for dates), on March 31 **The Who** (pictured) release a live album recorded with a 50-piece orchestra in 2019. *The Who With Orchestra Live At Wembley* is available as a yellow, orange & red three-LP set, triple black vinyl, and two-CD + Blu-ray set.

WELCOME BACK

Delain

After a bitter divorce, the band return with a new album, with several former members returning to the fold.

Back in 2020, Dutch symphonic-metal veterans Delain seemed to be on the verge of extinction. Drained by covid and locked in a tortuous power struggle over the band's future, founder member and main songwriter Martijn Westerholt even discussed selling Delain as a business to his former bandmates. Negotiations collapsed, and a very public split followed in early 2021. Westerholt has now relaunched the band with a new singer, Romania-born Diana Leah, and a rebooted line-up including several ex-members. *Dark Waters*, their mighty seventh album, is released this month. We spoke to Westerholt to find out more.

Delain are back after a turbulent few years. How was the pandemic lockdown for you?

I had quite a roller-coaster, with the split from the previous line-up. And then also covid hit. But actually, for me that was kind of a blessing, weirdly enough, because it gave me time to recuperate. It also gave us time to really explore properly if we could continue with the previous line-up. Sadly that did not work out, but it did give me time and space to see if life could continue after death.

You are the sole survivor from the previous Delain line-up. Amicable separation, or bitter divorce?

A very bitter divorce, I have to say, sadly. We worked the way we worked for fifteen years. And then because of the success, and me being responsible in the end for everything, I got into burn-out. The other guys simply wanted to take over the band, that's what it boiled down to. I'm not saying they're bad and I'm good, because everybody has their perspective. They probably had their reasons. But yeah, for me that was terrible.

The band are now reborn, but presumably for a while you believed Delain had no future.

Yes. But I'm blessed with knowing a lot of musicians, and they all told me: "You have to continue this." So I thought about it. I thought there needed to be enough Delain DNA in the music. Delain has a strong past working with guests, so firstly I thought I would continue as a solo project. But then the funny thing is, ex-members returned to continue the band. Most musicians, when they're about thirty, reach this kind of crossroads: "Am I going to be a full-time musician? Am I going to have a family?" That's why they left. But now they are ten years older and settled and the kids are growing up. So they returned. Then it was clear for me: we can continue as a band.

"Delain came back from pretty deep, we were in dark waters."

Does the new album have an overall theme or narrative for you?

Yes. Because Delain came back from pretty deep, we were in dark waters and it was a question if we would ever emerge again. You can see some of that imagery in the video for *Beneath*; you see this girl being brought back to the surface.

***Dark Waters* is full of huge, shiny, emo-metal anthems. Was it a conscious choice to sound more melodic and pop-friendly?**

Actually, with every album I tell myself it has to be harder, tougher, more metal. Ha! I'm gonna sound a little bit hippie now, but the river of creativity takes you wherever it takes you. As long as it comes from the heart, you know? I don't want to be too analytical about it. Music is emotion. **SD**

Dark Waters is out now via Napalm Records.

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MY FIRST LOVE

KISS ALIVE!

By Scott Ian

The Anthrax guitarist reflects on the lasting impact on him of an iconic live album.

"If I had to choose, the greatest album would probably be *Kiss Alive!,* just because of what it means to me and the influence that it's had on my life. For me as a kid, Kiss was just the biggest influence on me as far as moving ahead in my life was concerned and knowing what I wanted to do with my life, which was play guitar in a band. Because of that album, that's why anyone gives a shit about anything I have to say or do, because *Kiss Alive!* put me on that path of wanting to be a guy in a band.

"It just connected with me in a really strong way back in 1975. I loved the songs, I loved the look, and as a kid who was into comic books and horror, it was drugs for me as an eleven-year-old. It was the perfect place, perfect time for me to hear and see something like that. And they're still one of the biggest bands in the world, so I guess it worked! I'm friends with Gene Simmons and Paul Stanley and Ace Frehley and Peter Criss now. I've known Gene for thirty years, and he's well aware of what Kiss means to me."

NEWS

Astonishing but true: Black Sabbath - The Ballet, a brand new setting for the music of **Black Sabbath**, begins a five-date run at Birmingham Hippodrome on September 23, with further bookings to be announced at Plymouth's Theatre Royal and Sadler's Wells in London. "I'd never imagined pairing Black Sabbath with ballet," says former Sabbath guitarist Tony Iommi, "but it's got a nice ring to it!"

Iron Maiden, **Soundgarden**, **Kate Bush**, **Willie Nelson**, **The White Stripes**, **Rage Against The Machine**, **Sheryl Crow** and **Joy Division**/**New Order** are among the eligible names to be inducted into the Hall Of Fame this year. The HOF recently issued a new 'mission statement', explaining that it "celebrates the sound of youth culture and honours the artists whose music connects us all".

Metallica (pictured) will launch their new album *72 Seasons* with a worldwide listening party in cinemas on April 13, the day before the album is released. Tickets for these surround-sound events, which also include exclusive videos and interviews, go on sale on March 2 at metallica.film

Ian Hunter has put together a stellar cast of contributors for his new album, titled *Defiance Part 1*, released on April 21 via Sun Records. Slash, Duff McKagan, Joe Elliott, Brad Whitford, Billy Gibbons, Ringo Starr and Taylor Hawkins are among those who appear on the record.

WELCOME BACK

The Hold Steady

Craig Finn on revolution tourists, desperate characters being good for storytelling, and exploitation.

"TWO RECORDS AGO we made *Thrashing Thru The Passion*," The Hold Steady singer Craig Finn explains, "a record that was very piecemeal, putting out the songs as we recorded them and then compiling them when we had enough for an album. The last one, *Open Door Policy* [2021], we said let's make an album, and this seemed like an extension of that."

Taking a similar companion-piece approach as their celebrated 2006-08 era of *Boys And Girls In America* and *Stay Positive*, The Hold Steady's ninth album, *The Price Of Progress*, revisited its precursor's studio and has the same producer (Josh Kaufman), but brings fresh tones of funk and psych-rock to their ever-raging bar-band party – as well as an air of modern desperation to its stories of post-rehab rockers, arguing drifters and revolution tourists.

"On the B-side of this record we start to see a little bit of revolution."

***Grand Junction*, the new album's opener, is about a couple driving with no plan, in search of meaning and belonging. Are you still living a life that adventurous?**

My joke is that if they were all about my own life there'd be a lot more going to the grocery store. The solo records I've done have allowed me to do smaller stories about people who are maybe more like myself and a little more vulnerable. But when The Hold Steady gets together and there's big guitars and big drums, the stories I want to tell are bigger.

What draws you to so many lost and broken characters?

Desperate characters make sudden moves, which makes them useful in storytelling. A lot of the people on this record are being squeezed by the late-stage capitalism. They're people that are interfacing with the way we survive in a capitalist world, and they're being squeezed by things like inflation or income inequality.

There are sharp political diversions too – the tourist protagonists in *The Birdwatchers* seem to end up in some kind of private militia.

On the B-side of this record we start to see a little bit of revolution, which may or may not be a natural place to extend the notion of late-stage capitalism. In *The Birdwatchers* there's this idea of people going to another country, maybe an island nation, to check out a revolution under the guise of being ecological tourists.

And *Distortions Of Faith* is quite withering about performers who play in corrupt nations for millions.

That was the idea. A pop star goes and performs for a dictator, and the people tear down the stage and she and her entourage barely make an escape at the airstrip.

A metaphor for the rich capitalist West exploiting poor countries?

Yeah. It seems like, instead of bread or water, here's a concert by a pop star.

We also visit the regular Hold Steady song setting of a bar where you blag tickets, at the door a seductive girl gives you drugs, and you hang out with the band all night. Where is this and how can we get involved?

It's in Brooklyn. When we started this band, I kept imagining this band we could start that was a bar band that was actually kind of cool. So I always had this idea of the band in the corner being a part of the story, and maybe that's us. **MB**

The Price of Progress is out March 31 via Positive Jams/Thirty Tigers.

SCOTT IAN: WILL IRELAND; THE HOLD STEADY: SHERVIN LAINEZ/PRESS

BOBBY RONDINELLI ED TERRY RANDY PRATT DON AIREY DAVE MANIKETTI PAT THRALL
PAT TRAVERS TC TOLLIVER JZ BARRELL TRACY G. JOEL HOEKSTRA CARMINE APPICE

hyperspace RECORDS

"This album has a great mixture of ROCK and FUNK, with POWERFUL vocals and HEAVY guitar riffs. This amazing album was well performed, recorded, produced, and written and I highly recommend this album for your rock library!"
—OASIS ENTERTAINMENT

"Funky hard rock, groove laden tunes a launching pad for Ed Terry's powerful vocals and plenty of white hot soloing. Guitar firepower and funky rhythms abound. Pretty heavy stuff here from Ruffyunz. Off to a great start thanks to inspired performances and memorable material.
—SEA OF TRANQUILITY

"Second album for Ruffyunz, partnership between Randy Pratt (Cactus/ The Lizards), JZ Barrell (Emmy Award Winning producer) & singer Ed Terry is a collection of LARGE musicians. Among the guests on this exciting Record, the legendary Bobby Rondinelli on drums (Black Sabbath, Rainbow, BOC), Don Airey at keyboards (Deep Purple), and a bevy of guitarists from the likes of Dave Maniketti (Y&T), Pat Thrall (Pat Travers, Glenn Hughes, Meatloaf, Asia), Tracy G. (DIO) and Joel Hoekstra (Whitesnake). The result is excellent: 9 songs with a great blend of rock-blues and funk, with vocals powerful and fiery guitar riffs.
—CLASSIC ROCK, ITALIA

"The album is dominated by an upbeat, funky feel that doubles with hard rock and blues elements when occasion calls. There are great songs to be found here, one of them being the groovy opener "Hype in my Head". Another album favorite, "Back It on Up" is a chunky rocker that benefits from Don Airey's exquisite, arabesque-flavored flourishes. Ruffyunz beget a genuine stunner with "Dark Side", while "Can't Slow Down" captures that vital rock magnetism.
—THE ROCKTOLOGIST

"Randy Pratt and his compadres, singer Ed Terry and guitarist JZ Barrell, backed by Bobby Rondinelli, Pratt's colleague from THE LIZARDS, and flanked by a few other famous friends whose passages help lift the record's pieces to an epic level without losing the music's levity, and such contrast is what should make the ensemble's sophomore effort stand out and rock in style.
—LET IT ROCK, CANADA

And starring in our video, Pat Thrall from the classic Pat Travers band line up, Hughes Thrall, Asia and if you're old and cool enough to know the band AUTOMATIC MAN, that's Pat!

Look for the upcoming release RUFFYUNZ III featuring Carmine "The Godfather" Appice.

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> "I'm taking my influences from people who've been influenced by the pioneers of blues."

HIGH HOPES

Laura Cox

Say bonjour to the French YouTube star-turned-bona fide rock contender.

Last summer, Laura Cox opened for Kiss in torrential rain. Lightning flashed through the downpour, leaving the French festival site flooded. For a while it looked as though no one would play, until organisers U-turned, and Cox and her band found themselves hastily unloading their gear in the mud, hoping they weren't heading into mortal danger. Happily their set went well. Afterwards they legged it to shelter, leaving the crowd pumped for their headliners.

Or at least that was the plan. But Kiss remained in their truck.

"The fans were completely crazy," Cox recalls. "And then the organisers came on stage saying: 'Sorry, you can go home now.'" Moments like this reflect the whirlwind of change that 32-year-old Parisienne Cox has been through. Her third album, *Head Above Water*, marks the peak of that change, swirling the classic rock, blues and countrified sounds that have long been part of her repertoire. It was written largely in Portugal, where Cox escaped to during lockdown, meeting new people and broadening her outlook in the process, all of which feeds into the lyrics.

"For example, I used to be just in a guy's world going on tour, so I used to hear sexist jokes, but it was normal. Now, if some guys are making jokes that are not funny, I'm saying something."

One of the first YouTube guitarists to build a serious following (her channel, started in 2006, was among the first of its kind), Cox spent her first eight guitar-playing years entirely in her bedroom, playing instrumental classic rock covers, and eventually singing her own songs. Compared to today's social media landscape, where shredder channels seem to proliferate by the hour, it was a different world. "Everything was simpler back then," she reflects. "I stayed with the same video-editing skills. And I think I was lucky, because I arrived at a time [when] I think it was the right combination; the right timing, a bit of luck, hard work, motivation."

Initially Cox studied architecture, but switched to a sound-engineering course when the call of the guitar proved too strong. Periods of work in a rehearsal studio and a guitar shop followed, until she was able to pursue music professionally. In 2013 she played her first gig. By that point she had several million YouTube views, but zero live experience. The pressure was huge.

"I thought: 'This is my first gig ever. I cannot mess it up.' It was not horrible, but it was not the best show of my life either. I think we were so stressed that we played the songs really, really fast!"

Almost 10 years later she's an official Gibson artist, gearing up for a solo tour and enjoying the respect of her peers – who, at this point, are as exciting to her as the veterans (GN'R, the Stones, AC/DC…) that got her started. "I'm really happy to be followed [online] by people I listen to," she enthuses, "like Black Stone Cherry, Tyler Bryant, Rival Sons and bands like this." **PG**

Head Above Water is out now via earMusic.

FOR FANS OF…

"It's a mix of blues and rock influences," Cox says of Tyler Bryant's *Wild Child*. "I sent him a little jam I was doing over one of his songs, and we started talking. I love his music. I never listened to traditional classic blues the way he does, but I'm taking my influences from people who've been influenced by the pioneers of blues, like Tyler has."

© LETURK/PRESS

Jellyfish

The King Is Half-Undressed

How the paisley underground and a classic fairy tale inspired the West Coast quartet's catchy first single.

Words: **Bill DeMain**

Jellyfish were the right band at the wrong time. Their first single, *The King Is Half-Undressed*, in 1991, sounded like The Beatles, Queen and ELO rolled into one – a baroque-rock blitz that should have made them huge right out of the gate. But in 1990 they arrived on a scene that was ruled by two trends: boy bands and grunge.

"Not only did we not fit with the sounds of the time," Roger Manning Jr. tells *Classic Rock*, "but it was very clear that what Andy [Sturmer] and I enjoyed writing and collaborating on, our sound and vision, was going further and further away from our generation at that time. But we didn't really care about scenes. For us, it always came down to the song."

Manning and Sturmer met in high school in San Francisco, bonding over record collections and a love of 60s melodic pop. Their first band together, Beatnik Beatch, got signed to Atlantic, then "quickly got lost in the shuffle". From the wreckage, the two friends formed the nucleus of Jellyfish. Of their early days, Manning recalls: "I was working sales at a music store in Haight-Ashbury. I dreaded it, but at least I could make enough to pay for the closet I was living in for a few hundred a month. It was a starving-artist, eye-on-the-prize, but pretty humiliating existence. But it happened to be an existence set in the basement of a recording studio."

Following the lead of studio-hermit artists such as Talking Heads and Tears For Fears, the pair started logging every spare moment demo-ing their songs and learning about recording. "We got used to being these lone guns," Manning says. "A lot of our heroes talked about getting record deals through the demo process, not through playing the club circuit and getting discovered by some record company scout. It was more like, figure out how to make the best-sounding demo you can with the equipment you have, and that's what'll seal the deal.

"That's what we believed in," Manning continues. "We didn't really have a choice, because we didn't have a band yet. So we taught ourselves all the technology."

Along with their technical forays, the friends were constantly composing. *The King Is Half-Undressed* began with a verse idea that Manning says was sparked by his brief stint playing keyboards with the Paisley Underground band The Corsairs. "They were led by Alan Shalby, who was just this wunderkind. A surfer, a car mechanic and an incredible songwriter. He was like a Beach Boy out of the sixties, but in the late eighties. He was also the big brother I never had to kick my ass creatively. He encouraged me. It was more education than I'd received in any course in music school.

"So I started *The King Is Half Undressed* literally just copping this verse feel that Alan had in one of his songs. Of course, I changed the chords and melody. I was very excited about it, and brought it to Andy. In fifteen minutes we finished the chorus together. He came up with that repetitive melodic pattern, and we just sat there, streamlining it. We were both like: 'Wow, that's solid!'"

The evocative title, a play on Hans Christian Andersen's folktale *The Emperor's New Clothes*, inspired a free-associative lyric from Sturmer. In 1993 he told me: "As a lyricist, I try not to edit myself, because I think when you do that kind of Kerouac-type of writing, just blurting things out, that's the real window to your psyche. It's like speaking in tongues, and you'll hit on certain phrases that really resonate. And it's funny, a lot of people will come up to me quoting some lyric back to me, a line that I wouldn't have thought would make sense to anybody, and it touches them in some way. *The King Is Half-Undressed* has an element of that."

Their demo served as a blueprint for the recording, with two changes. "Our producer Albhy Galuten suggested we try a different feel on the verse," says Manning, "which led Andy to come up with that *Tomorrow Never Knows*-type groove. It was intense to watch him perform that live. It was quite athletic. And then Jason [Falkner, guitar] came up with the idea for the vocal interlude section, with those Crosby, Stills And Nash cluster-type harmony vocals. That really sealed it for me. Then we wanted a further departure, where the song came down to almost nothing before we return to the chorus out."

The end result was insanely catchy, but, at four minutes and with tempo shifts, a challenging spin for radio. "Every song on [Jellyfish's 1990 debut album] *Bellybutton* was completely irrelevant to what was currently going on in commercial music," Manning says with a laugh. "But all the songs are single-worthy. We were adamant about having a chorus that was some kind of ear worm. The label got behind it. So did MTV. So initially the song came out guns blazing."

The single made the UK Top 40 and got college radio play in the States. Now included in *When These Memories Fade*, a singles box set, *The King Is Half-Undressed* is part of the story of a late-lamented band whose two-year, two-album legacy grows stronger every year. The reclusive Sturmer now writes music for cartoons and Japanese pop bands. Manning is more visible as a member of Beck's band and The Lickerish Quartet (with ex-Jellyfish members Tim Smith and Eric Dover).

Looking back on Jellyfish's brief but indelible moment, Manning says: "There was never any intention of disbanding as early as we did. Circumstances force you to make choices; there are always forks in the road. We couldn't hold it together personally. I'm amazed that we got the attention of as many people as we did."

When These Memories Fade is out now via New Land +.

"Our producer suggested we try a different feel on the verse, which led that *Tomorrow Never Knows*-type groove."

TALKING POINTS

"We tried to capture the loose cartoon Saturday-morning kids TV show-meets-Alice Cooper aspect of the band," Manning says of the song's video. With fruit and flowers flying out of top hats and the band dancing on what looks like the surface of Jupiter, it all "seemed fine on paper".

"That first visual announcement to the world suffers from our lack of being cultured in the world of video."

Or as guitarist Jason Falkner put it: "Some people were like: 'This is amazing!' But the majority were like: 'These goofballs. What is this?'"

JELLYFISHVEVO/UMG (ON BEHALF OF EMI)

GETTY

Jellyfish in 1990: (l-r) Roger Manning Jr., Andy Sturmer, Jason Falkner, Chris Manning.

THE FACTS

RELEASE DATE
July 1990
HIGHEST CHART POSITION
UK No.39
PERSONNEL
Andy Sturmer
Vocals, drums
Roger Manning Jr.
Keyboards, backing vocals
Jason Falkner
Guitars, backing vocals
Chris Manning,
Bass
WRITTEN BY
Andy Sturmer & Roger Manning Jr.
PRODUCED BY
Albhy Galuten & Jack Joseph Puig
LABEL
Charisma

Q&A

Robert Fripp

The King Crimson co-founder on choosing guitar, musical influences, band principles and heartbreaking departures.

Interview: **David Mead** Portrait: **Adam Gasson**

Robert Fripp is difficult to get hold of. One of rock's most idiosyncratic figures and one of the chief architects of progressive rock via King Crimson, he rarely gives interviews, and prompts a mix of memories from past and present bandmates. Today he's the sole remaining founding member of Crimson, who recently were the subject of the compelling documentary film *In The Court Of The Crimson King: King Crimson At 50*.

Now, with Crimson on another hiatus, Fripp has thrown himself into other things. Last year he reissued his 1979 solo album *Exposure*. He and wife Toyah Wilcox have continued to delight and confound with their Sunday Lunch streams; a surreal, unprecedented dive into the daft for a man with a reputation as serious, impenetrable.

But where did it all begin?

How did you become interested in music – and the guitar – in the first place?
At age eleven my sister and I bought two records: *Rock With The Caveman* by Tommy Steele, and *Don't Be Cruel* by Elvis Presley. There weren't any English rock musicians, they were all jazzers – old men, basically. In America it was entirely different. There was nothing demeaning about playing rock music and moving out of blues. Scotty Moore, Chuck Berry, the sheer power of Jerry Lee Lewis. At thirteen, trad jazz came along. I would go down to the Winter Gardens in Bournemouth and see all the characters: Chris Barber, Acker Bilk, Monty Sunshine… It segued into The Beatles and 1960s English rock instrumentals. When I was seventeen I saw The Outlaws at a show in Poole, with Ritchie Blackmore. He was then eighteen. He was phenomenal. He had the music, he had the playing, it was astonishing.

Was there an influence on you musically from listening to classical music?
I began listening to the Bartók String Quartet and Stravinsky's *The Rite Of Spring*. The turning point in my musical, and I suppose personal, life was something like 'music is one'. I didn't hear separate categories, I heard music as if it was one musician speaking in a variety of dialects.

There isn't a great deal of blues influence in your playing.
Why didn't I become a blues guitarist? Probably because I wasn't a very good blues guitarist. The thing is, a lot of young players, and some established players, have said to me: "I only wanted to be like Clapton." They didn't say it, but you knew it. That wasn't my aim. Stunning player, but… The question eventually became formulated for me as: "What would Hendrix sound like playing the Bartók String Quartets?" In 1969 the major musical influences in Crimson were [multi-instrumentalist] Ian McDonald and [drummer] Michael Giles.

How did McDonald and Giles's influence connect with you in Crimson's early days?
In the studio recording [debut album] *In The Court Of The Crimson King*, they would make a comment, [and] I would adjust my response to sit in accord with theirs. Then when they left it was heartbreaking for me, because although Giles wasn't a writer his contributions to the arrangements and direction were stunning. My primary role for *In the Court* in Crimson in 1969, as I saw it, was to come up with guitar parts that supported the writing. Although you could say that McDonald and [lyricist Peter] Sinfield were the main writers, you can't really exclude anyone from that; it was five people. For me, Crimson has always been a co-operative, which it certainly was in 1969.

That led to some turbulence within the band, didn't it?
My personal difficulties with any Crimson musician since have been if they favour themselves or see themselves as somehow coming ahead of the other players, or the music. The music comes first, principle one. Principle two: the band comes first. The interests of the band come ahead of the interests of the other players. Three: we share the money. Why do there seem to be personal difficulties? Look at those three principles, and that's the clue to anything that follows. If the music does come first, then all the names are there at the top. We shared the record royalties, we shared the publishing royalties.

Last year's *Exposure* box set includes Steven Wilson remixes of your solo material. As with the Crimson remixes he's done, they're remarkably faithful to the originals.
Steven's aim was very faithfully to reproduce the original but with modern technology. There had been the odd discussions. For example, with *Lizard* there were one or two things we didn't quite put in, and so on. My view on occasion has been that we actually didn't get it right the first time, so now is an opportunity. Then you say: "What's right and what's wrong?" In terms of *Exposure*, I was very up for complete re-imagining. Steven [says]: "No, this is a classic." That desk [pointing to an antique writing desk in the room in which we are sitting] is an 1830s desk. It's a classic of its kind. If I were designing a desk to use with modern things, such as having computers on the side, it wouldn't be designed like that. However, for me that is the classic and I'm not going to redesign it. That's Steven's point of view.

Revisiting *Exposure*, was it possible to see a stylistic link between Crimson albums *Red* from the mid-seventies and *Discipline* from the early eighties? Was this an idea forming in your mind during Crimson's hiatus in the late seventies?
Was it Steve Reich? Was it Philip Glass? Was it Robert Fripp? Was it world music? Anyway, all of this, my thinking, my academic interests and approach to music were in place in 1980, 1981, with the coming together of that form of King Crimson. I met Adrian [Belew, guitarist/vocalist] personally at The Bottom Line in New York when I went down to see Steve Reich. Bowie was there with Adrian. We went over and said hello and Adrian said: "Let's get together for tea tomorrow." So we did. That's how our personal connection began.

Toyah And Robert's Sunday Lunch Live! UK tour begins on September 30. *See Listings (p97) for dates.*

Robert Fripp: finding a new audience via Sunday Lunch with the missus.

"I heard music as if it was one musician speaking in a variety of dialects."

6 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT...

Empyre

The new men in black have survived sickly gigs, killed rock giants, made grown men weep...

Interview: **Henry Yates**

As Empyre frontman Henrik Steenholdt admits, his native Northamptonshire doesn't have many local heroes, especially when it comes to music. The band's pitch as the Midlands county's great rock hope began in 2016, when Steenholdt, guitarist Did Coles, bassist Grant Hockley and drummer Elliot Bale forged a shadowy sound touched by the anthems of Pearl Jam and Alter Bridge. Now, with the orchestral flourishes of second album *Relentless*, Empyre are entering their imperial phase.

007 inspired their new album.
Obviously they wouldn't have wished for the lockdown, which broke the stride of 2019's debut album *Self Aware*. But Empyre used the downtime to add swooping orchestration to the alt.rock stylings of *Relentless*.

"Metallica on *S&M* or Guns N' Roses with *November Rain*, that's what we're aspiring to," says Steenholdt. "Soundtracks are a big influence – like Max Richter, Hans Zimmer, John Williams, John Barry. If you listen to [new-album track] *Your Whole Life Slows*, there's a little ode to *Goldfinger*, with the trumpets doing that 'pah-paah-pah!'"

They're proud to be killjoys.
You can tell when Empyre have hit the stage, because the temperature in the venue drops.

"The bands we play with, like Massive Wagons, are way more 'party band' than us," says Steenholdt. "We're more morbid, introspective, darker. We have a joke that we come along and kill the vibe. The rules of an Empyre gig are: one, no singing; two, no clapping; and three, no looking as if you're having a good time. We take a crowd shot after each show, and instead of devil horns, everyone does Italian-style pinched fingers. Even our merch T-shirts have the Grim Reaper doing it. Pinched fingers are the new devil horns."

They skinned Steve Vai. Well, sort of.
Empyre are formidable giant killers, winning our website Louder's Track Of The Week on three occasions, and even scalping shred lord Steve Vai with their latest single *Hit And Run*.

"I'd like to think Steve is licking his wounds, but I'm not sure he's got us on his radar," considers

Empyre: unlike The Who, they hope they get old before they die.

Steenholdt. "*Hit And Run* is about going back to the Danish town of Sønderborg, where I spent my college years, and finding my friends had all moved away. There are a few new songs about mental health. With *Forget Me,* I wanted to write the saddest song I could about a guy who's made the conscious decision to kill himself. That's not to say those lyrics are about us. I'd like to be immortal, actually!"

They laugh in the face of food poisoning.
At the sharp end of the rock circuit, says Steenholdt, you can't show up with a sick note.

"The hardest gig we ever did was a festival just before the pandemic. All of us were in a terrible state. Grant just had his appendix out. Did was on painkillers for a back injury. I'd passed out in the toilet the night before. As for Elliot's stomach, let's just say he did well not to use his drum stool as a loo. It felt calamitous. But the gig was unbelievable. I even hit the note in our cover of Chris Cornell's Bond theme *You Know My Name.*"

Their music will make you cry like a baby.
If you find sweat and tears flowing equally during Empyre's set, that's how they planned it.

"People tell us: 'When you played that song, I cried'," says Steenholdt. "That's exactly what I want to hear. When I see a band, I want to feel the hairs on the back of my neck, which Eddie Vedder and Myles Kennedy manage to do. As a frontman I want to emit an ambience, an aura. The only bit I don't like about Eddie Vedder is when he starts ranting about politics. That ruined the last Pearl Jam show I went to."

Getting older doesn't scare them.
The Empyre line-up might be skirting their forties, but ageing holds no fear for them.

"Myles Kennedy must be in his fifties and he's still hitting amazing notes," says Steenholdt. "Axl Rose is not what he was but he's still pretty good. And how on earth are the Rolling Stones still so good? The likes of those guys – what a demonstration of how it can be done. We aspire to be like them."

Relentless is released on March 31 via Kscope.

ROB BLACKHAM/PRESS

BRINGING IT ON HOME

Released in 1973, **Led Zeppelin**'s fifth album was not without controversy. It also split fans, confused by its range of musical styles and wondering where its *Whole Lotta Love* or *Stairway* was. But *Houses Of The Holy* signposted the way forward for a band now operating at their peak.

Words: **Mick Wall**

In drab, recession-hit Britain, 1973 paradoxically was the year of glam rock. Of boys who would be girls who would be boys cavorting on *Top Of The Pops* in tin-foil costumes, 12-inch stack-heels and trowelled-on make-up.

All that glitter had come early for Led Zeppelin, however. Already the most glamourous rock group in the world, the astonishing planet-devouring success of their famously untitled fourth album, aka *Led Zep IV*, meant Zeppelin were also now the biggest.

They had already been Number One in Britain and America simultaneously long before Bowie had acquired his lightning flash or Bolan had begun sticking stars on his funky little boat race. And it was Zeppelin who would release the most fabulously outré album of the year, one that perfectly summed up the joyous anything-goes atmosphere of the 1973 music scene. An album reveled in hedonistic pleasures, which they'd titled *Houses Of The Holy*.

The fifth Led Zeppelin album, which celebrates its 50th anniversary this month, it was also their first to have a title other than the band name, and was the gladdest they ever sounded. The most beautifully poised. The most downright colourful and sparkly and infectious. As Jimmy Page recalled: "You can hear the fun we were having. You can also hear the dedication and commitment."

This was peak Led Zeppelin, a band now at their creative zenith. Only the Rolling Stones matched them for musical promiscuousness, as both toyed, variously, with funk, reggae, country, West Coast. Then on *Houses Of The Holy* Zep went even further, allowing jazz, synthesisers, folk, doo-wop and Asian raga influences to seep into their signature sound.

> **"We were buccaneer musicians, ready to try anything. *Houses Of The Holy* was the result."**
>
> **Robert Plant**

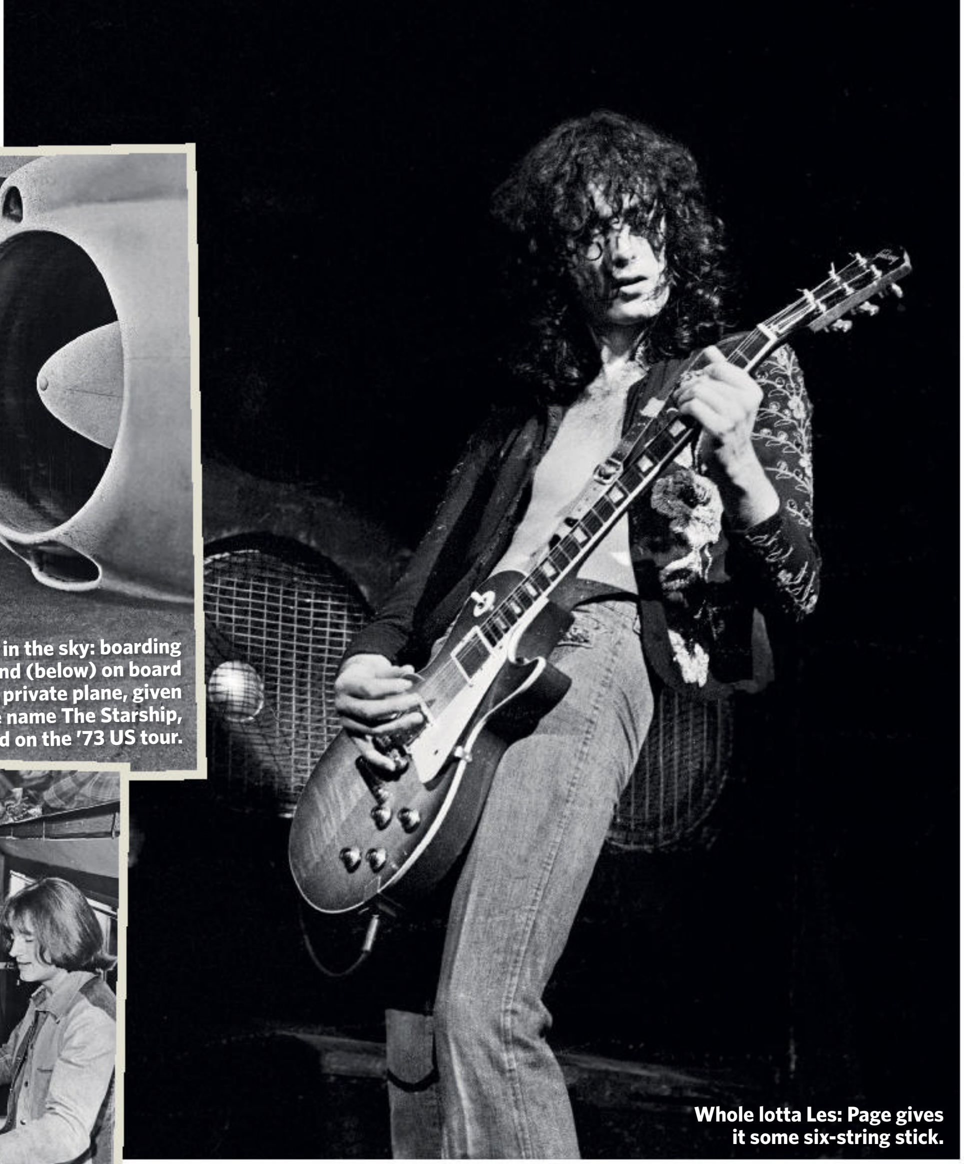
As Robert Plant told me: "By that time the whole thing had taken on an entirely different aspect. It was such a big deal by then, the feeling of freedom it gave out was tremendous. We were buccaneer musicians, ready to try anything. *Houses Of The Holy* was the result."

For Zeppelin, the newfound glitz and musical frivolity of 1973 had begun as far back as December 1971, when they entered Basing Street Studios in London. Straight from their 'UK winter tour', nobody had been sleeping and they sizzled as they jammed together.

Page was 27 and supreme master of all he ▷

PHOTOS: EVENING STANDARD/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES; KEVIN NIXON
MANIPULATION: SAM WILLIAMS @ MAGICTORCH

Spirits in the sky: boarding and (below) on board Zep's private plane, given the name The Starship, used on the '73 US tour.



Whole lotta Les: Page gives it some six-string stick.

surveyed, the light, the dark and everything between. Plant, at 23, was in golden-god mode and, as one onlooker observed, "dripping in pussy". John Paul Jones was 25, could play anything and was already established as Page's musical consiglieri. John Bonham was also 23, and in full beast mode. Off the road, a family man, they said. But Zeppelin were never off the road.

Young men, at the height of their powers, and several songs that gleefully spun off in different directions arrived all at once, including some buried treasure that wouldn't see the light of day for years. The mellow, Neil Young-influenced *Down By The Seaside* and a fully leaded *The Rover*, both of which surfaced in buffed-up form three years later on *Physical Graffiti*. A semi-acoustic, cider-jug version of *Poor Tom*, nailed together by Page, Plant and Bonham that showed up a decade later on *Coda*. Most impressive, and decidedly deluxe, a cinematic, glacia-paced new synth-orchestrated made-for-midnight extravaganza Jonesy had been piecing together titled *No Quarter*. "We had little riffs here and there," Page remembered, "certain constructions. And it was a question of really working on it and seeing how things came together."

By April 1972, Zeppelin had hired the Rolling Stones' mobile studio and begun recording at Mick Jagger's country pile, Stargroves, in Hampshire, and continued later at Olympic in London, then Electric Lady in New York. Between times they had fitted in their first tour of Australia and New Zealand, a four-week schedule that saw them headlining 25,000-capacity venues such as the Western Spring Stadium in Auckland and the Showground Stadium in Sydney.

The new album was originally scheduled for release in August 1972, at the end of another sold-out summer tour of the US. But, not for the first time, there were problems with both the artwork and the mix, and it was eventually put back until the beginning of 1973, by which time the band had completed their second Japanese tour and a long, 25-date trip around the UK, which began in December and continued to the end of January – the last time Zeppelin would ever tour their home country. They didn't know that then, of course. It was seen as a triumphant homecoming.

> **"You can hear the fun we were having. You can also hear the dedication and commitment."**
>
> **Jimmy Page**

Zep were now the biggest-selling band in the world, and manager Peter Grant was boasting to anyone within earshot how they would rake in "over thirty million dollars this year alone".

It was now in 1973 that the feeling of invincibility that Grant had helped foster within the band really began to take hold. This was the rock-fabulous age of colour TVs out of windows and riding motorbikes down hotel corridors that Zeppelin and fellow travellers like the Stones and The Who came to embody.

No 70s guitar god represented the extreme Byronic sensibility in person though quite like Jimmy Page. For those who knew him, it was still just possible to see the real guy behind the image. But as the next few years skittered and jolted by, the mask would become harder and harder for him to peel off.

While both Bonham and Plant invested in farmhouse estates in the country, Page flitted between his newly acquired 18th-century manor in Sussex, Plumpton Place, complete with moat and terraces off into lakes, and flying visits to Aleister Crowley's infamous former abode, Boleskine House in the Scottish Highlands, intent on furthering his 'studies' into the occult. It was as though, having conquered this world, Page and Zeppelin now looked for dominion over the next.

Finally released in March 1973, *Houses Of The Holy*, in common with its illustrious predecessor, came with no writing on the sleeve, but an inner bag with full lyric sheet for the first time plus attendant info, all in the same enigmatic typeface as used for the track-listing on *Zep IV*, the album's title stencilled at the top of each page – for side two, back to front, as if in a mirror. There was also a paper band wrapped around the outer sleeve – a last-minute concession to their label, Atlantic Records – with group name and album title on it,

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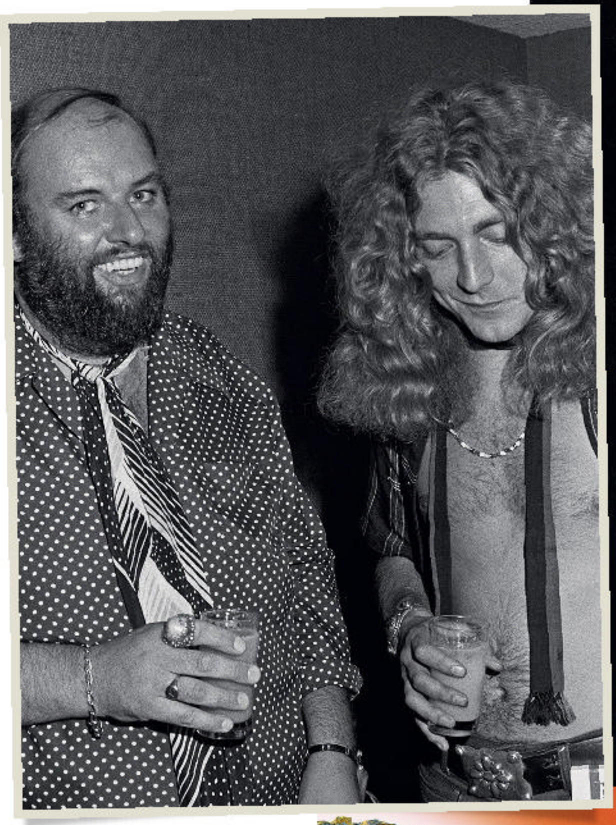
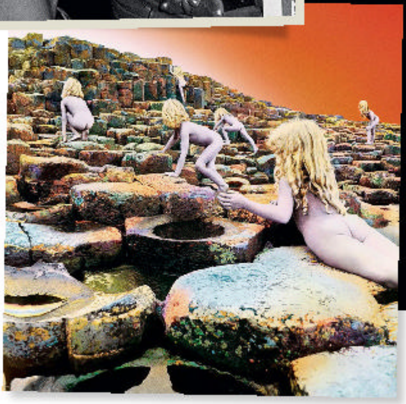


Plant in full-on rock god mode, and (left) with band manager Peter Grant.



to be taken off and binned after purchase.

The image that adorned the outer gatefold sleeve was their most arresting yet: a view from behind of 11 naked children (who turned out to be a single brother and sister, their images multiplied in the photographer's dark room) ascending a cratered hilltop slope. The inside appeared to depict a human sacrifice, one of the children being held aloft in the distance by an older, naked male figure as the sun's rays begin to crest over the hills. An echo, perhaps, of Crowley's symbolic sacrifice of the inner child. Few critics at the time picked up on the occult references, preferring to dwell, as one writer put it, on its "naughty overtones… naked little girls clambering up a mountain, a sexual representation of pre-sexual people".

"I wouldn't have looked at it that way at all," Page responded tetchily. "Children are houses of the holy; we're all houses of the holy. I don't see how that's naughty."

In fact, the *Houses Of The Holy* sleeve was conceived by Hipgnosis designer Aubrey Powell, after Page had angrily rejected the original idea put forward by Powell's partner, Storm Thorgerson: a picture of an electric-green tennis court with a tennis racquet on it.

"I said: 'What the hell does that have to do with anything?'" Page recalled. "And he said: 'Racket – don't you get it?' I said: 'Are you trying to imply that our music is a racket? Get out!'"

Powell, who hadn't heard the music, put forward two ideas: one involving a photo-shoot in Peru, the other a trip to the Giant's Causeway, the renowned rock formation on the north-east tip of Northern Ireland. Informed that both ideas would be extremely expensive, Powell recalled Grant exploding: "Money? We don't fucking care about money! Just fucking do it!"

Favouring the children-climbing-the-mountain idea, Powell arranged a trip to Ireland with the brother-and-sister child models, a camera crew and a make-up artist.

Intended as a full-colour shoot, Powell revised his plans when it rained the entire week, and shot in black and white. He had planned for the models to be painted gold and silver, but in the final hand-tinted images they appeared pale pink, almost white. "When I first saw it, I said: 'Oh, my God.' Then we looked at it and I said: 'Hang on a minute, this has an otherworldly quality.' So we left it as it was." The inside photo was taken at an ancient Celtic castle nearby, where the crew were "so cold, and so freaked out because it wasn't working, that the only thing I could keep everybody together with was a bottle of Mandrax [a sedative] and a lot of whisky".

'It was now that the feeling of invincibility that Peter Grant had helped foster within the band really began to take hold.'

The music on the album also had a certain colourfully 'hand-tinted' quality to it, the sound brighter and more effervescent than on any previous Zeppelin album.

"That was certainly the mood I encountered when I worked with them on it," says former Jimi Hendrix producer Eddie Kramer, who sat alongside Page in the mobile studio at Stargroves. "It was springtime in England and the atmosphere among the band was very jolly. Even the weather was really good. Jimmy had Jagger's bedroom at Stargroves, and everyone was happy."

The album opens with the ringing symphonic guitars of *The Song Remains The Same*, the first of four determinedly upbeat Page and Plant songs on which the album is built. The track's working title in the studio was *The Overture* and/or *The Campaign*. The overall feeling is immediately one of joyous abundance, excitement at life, the sheer thrill of it all. Plant's vocals were shrilly enhanced by Page speeding them up in the studio. The chiming guitars were shamelessly filched from the opening chords of The Yardbirds' 1967 track *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Sailor*, originally credited to Page and Yardbirds drummer Jim McCarty. On *Houses Of The Holy* the guitars are layered to such extremes that they begin to resemble the sound of a sitar or tambura. With Plant's artificially accelerated vocals in such a high register, they too begin to resemble the excitement of Indian reed and vocal music.

"The whole album had a very upbeat quality to it," Kramer recalls. "There was a unity of spirit and a unity of direction of sound. A lot of that, of course, had to do with Pagey and the fact he had a very clear idea of what he wanted. This was one of the tracks Jimmy brought in rough mixes of ▷

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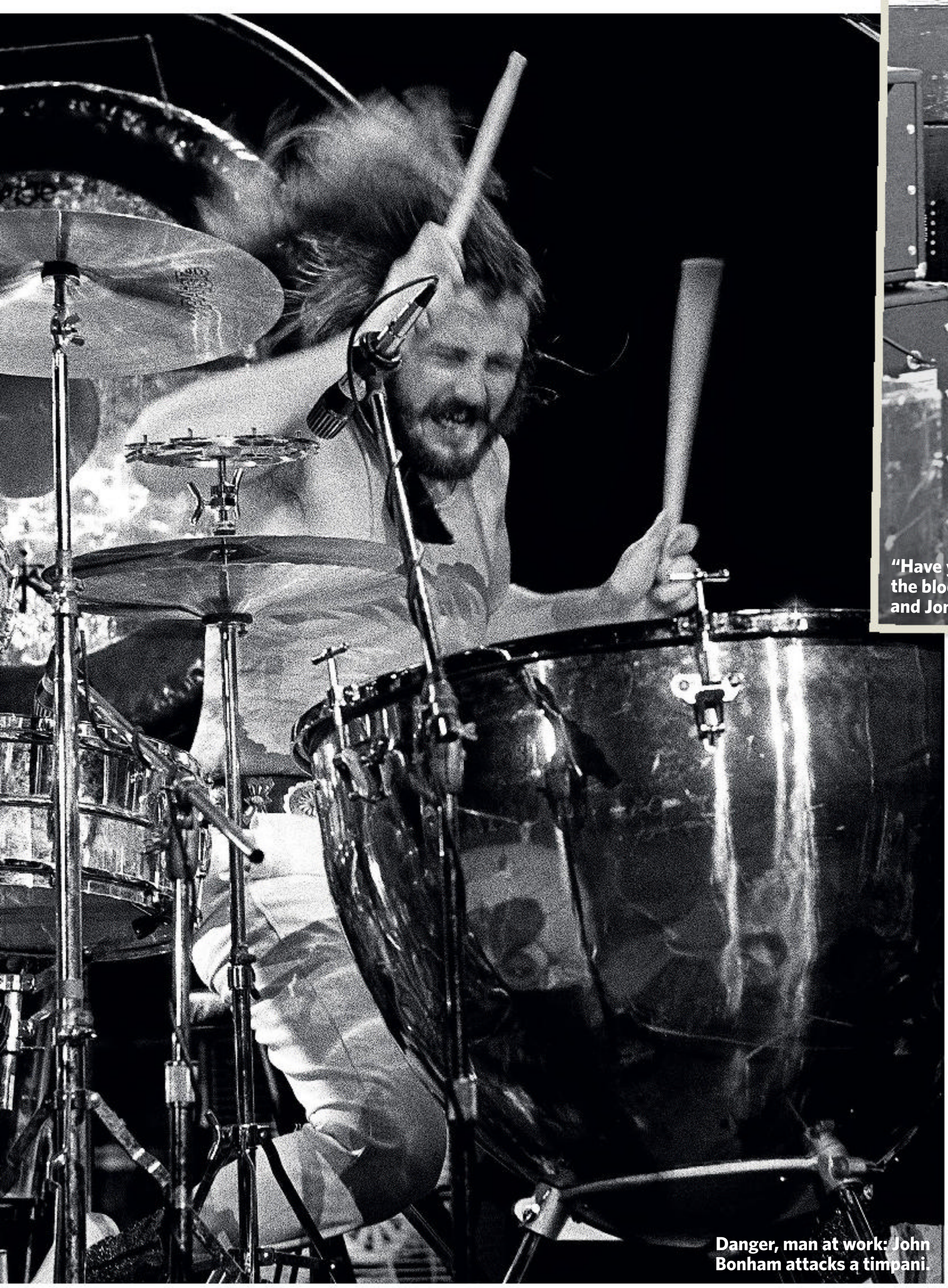


Danger, man at work: John Bonham attacks a timpani.

"Have you seen the size of the bloody audience?" Plant and Jones ready to rock.

"Children are houses of the holy; we're all houses of the holy. I don't see how that's naughty."

Jimmy Page on the *HOTH* album sleeve

on cassette. The cassette was his bible. He had his own studio by then and was always bringing his cassette machine in."

The Rain Song, which follows *The Song Remains The Same*, was originally conceived as an extension of *The Overture*, but became a track in its own right after Plant unexpectedly added verses to the latter, turning the former into a smouldering elegy to '*the springtime of my loving*'. It's an equally euphoric, if slowed down, sunburst of a song, Jones adding exotic texture with swelling orchestral sounds from his newly acquired Mellotron, a mechanical instrument that uses tape loops triggered by a keyboard. It was a favourite effect until then of progressive rock groups like Genesis and the Moody Blues.

Kramer: "I love this track, because of its typically esoteric Pagey guitar tuning, but also because of the role John Paul plays on it. This was the album where Jonesy finally stepped out of the shadows. He was a superb arranger, who could conduct an orchestra while playing bass with one hand. I once saw him do that! That Mellotron he plays is what lifts the track to another emotional level. And the piano, which he also plays, is like rain drops. Or maybe tear drops. I don't think they'd ever done a track so subtle before. That's the test of a great arranger, to do something so subtle yet which has such power. Quite beautiful."

Similarly fresh-sounding was *Over The Hills And Far Away*, a climax in a trilogy of crescendoing openers, its signature acoustic-electric dynamic traceable all the way back to *Babe I'm Gonna Leave You* and *Ramble On* from the first and second albums respectively.

Another feature of the album that Kramer identifies is how most of the tracks have their own boutique ending – Plant's orgasmic "Oh!" at the end of *The Song Remains The Same*; the echoing guitar at the climax of *The Rain Song*.

"The best, though, is the coda to *Over The Hills And Far Away*. I think it was something I suggested at the mixing stage. I used to do something similar with Hendrix sometimes – fade the track out, then bring it back, like an extra breath."

What really makes the track, though, "is that it really shows off the Zeppelin preoccupation with light and shade, acoustic and electric. Plus Bonham's dynamite drums!"

So too, *Dancing Days*, a snake-hipped, long hot summer of a song, inspired by a slouch-backed melody picked-up during a recent flying visit to Bombay, that finds the Page-Plant axis at its most delirious, all zinging guitars, bouncing drums, and Plant's voice cooing like the lovesick hippie he still believed himself to be.

"By the time they started playing the track with me, it just had the most amazing vibe," Kramer recalls. "Just a glorious groove! They all enjoyed playing it so much. The way Bonzo played it was what really made it, though. He just found a way to make the rhythm bounce and snap that could not be denied. I'll never forget playing it back to them from the mobile truck and how excited they all were. It was a lovely sunny day, and there was Jimmy and Robert and a couple of others all sort of linking arms and dancing on the lawn, sort of synchronised together. All dancing and laughing at the same time. I don't think even they could believe how good they sounded."

However, it was the other four *HOTH* tracks that provided most of the talking points, ▷

JAMES FORTUNE/ATLASICONS.COM x2

Plant picks up another bird: Kezar Stadium, San Francisco, June 1973.

JAMES FORTUNE/ATLASICONS.COM

typifying the more ensemble feel of the album, beginning with the last track on side one, a band composition titled *The Crunge*, a full-funk parody that singularly fails to deliver any laughs, despite a desperate last-ditch attempt by Plant who can be heard lampooning James Brown, demanding, "Where's that confounded bridge?"

Kramer offers a different point of view, though: *The Crunge* was "one of those tracks that sounds like it just started as an impromptu jam in the studio. But what you quickly learn about working with musicians of the calibre of Led Zeppelin is that nothing is ever brought to the recording that hasn't been worked over in Jimmy Page's mind to the nth degree."

In fact, the guitar riff Page plays had been something he'd been tinkering with since 1970.

"Of course, it is a fantastic jam, with Bonham and Jonesy especially really going to town. But the tension is very tightly held. I'd set Bonzo's drums up in the conservatory and the sound he got in there was phenomenal. Louder than hell! But they all knew what they were doing. And I love all that James Brown stuff Robert does about taking it to the bridge, because of course there is no bridge in this track. Hence the in-joke ending 'Where's that confounded bridge?'"

Much better was *D'Yer Maker*, a title filched from an old music-hall joke: 'My wife's gone to the West Indies.' 'Jamaica?' 'No, she went of her own accord.' Boom, boom!

Another band composition that critics assumed was another parody, this time of reggae, it was in fact an innovative re-imagining of the form, replete with grafted-on doo-wop vocals. (The question in parenthesis at the bottom of the lyric sheet, "Whatever happened to Rosie and the Originals?" refers to doo-wop singer Rosie Hamlin, whose 1960 hit *Angel Baby* had never been followed up, but who by 1973 was with the Blossoms, then working as a backing-vocal group for Elvis Presley.)

Reggae was a well-established form in the UK by 1973 – Bob Marley's game-changing album *Catch A Fire* was released that year – and Page was a big fan. Kramer says *D'Yer Maker* is his favourite track on the album. "Those huge drums that kick in at the start are like bombs going off. Christ almighty! Just the way he hit them! What's amazing, though, is how he keeps the bombs going off while playing this extraordinarily subtle and brilliant rhythm. The greatest rock drummer of all time. It can never be said enough.

"All credit must also go to Jonesy," Kramer continues, "whose bass takes the reggae rhythm to a wholly different place. I could go on about this one for hours. Suffice to say nothing like it had ever really been attempted by a rock band before. And it caused a lot of controversy when people first heard it. A real love-it-or-hate-it track, which I still love."

"The whole album had a very upbeat quality to it. There was a unity of spirit and a unity of direction of sound."

Engineer Eddie Kramer

The third band composition, *The Ocean*, which closes the album, was another vertiginously upbeat number that contained their most memorable guitar riff since *Bring It On Home* and was so clearly a crowd pleaser in the most elemental sense – Bonham in full Bonzo mode, growlingly counting in the song's pulverising beat. "We've done four already but now we're steady and then they went one … two… three…" Pow!

Already a mainstay of the band's encores long before it was finally released, "this was another one where Bonzo's drums just sound amazing", says Kramer. "Some of the stuff Jimmy asked him to do in Led Zeppelin… it was complicated shit and Jimmy would have to run through it with him a few times. But once he locked in, once he knew precisely what he had to play, then he would fuck with it and blow your mind, put in a fill where you would not expect it.

"We'd all be laughing because it was just so insane! But we were going for ambient sound. We utilised every aspect of the house and its grounds as best we could. I remember putting a Fender amp in the fireplace and putting a mic up in there. Jonesy's bass was in another room. Everybody's gear was in a different room. There was no CCTV, but I put talkback mics all around so people could yack to each other."

He adds that the final line about *'The girl who won my heart'* is a reference to Plant's daughter, Carmen, who was three years old at the time.

The only studiedly 'down' track on the album was the one begun two years earlier but remained unfinished until now: Jonesy's windswept and creepy piano-synthesiser opus *No Quarter*, an old pirate saying and a Keith Moon catchphrase. Its chilly ambience – *'Close the door, put out the lights'*, Plant intones solemnly, his voice filtered through distortion – is utterly at odds with the rest of the album, but an exemplary piece of contrasting

Kezar Stadium, San Francisco, June 1973. Zeppelin were breaking attendance records on their US tour.

work and another track destined to become a cornerstone of Zeppelin's live sets, Jonesy's own personal showcase.

Kramer: "I said this was the album where Jonesy really came into his own, and this is the track that proves it. I wasn't there when they finally recorded it, but they had demo versions of it going back a few years, which I'd heard some of. I seem to recall it had been a little higher tempo, but that when they slowed it down a touch it really started to take shape.

"This is one of the key tracks on the album that really demonstrates that Led Zeppelin could do anything they turned their minds to now – and do it better than anybody else. They were able to really stretch out now and experiment, which allowed the space for Jonesy to come in and do his thing on the arrangements. It wasn't just his brilliance as a keyboard player or even a writer, it was the subtlety of his arrangements, and the economy of notes that made this track such a powerful statement. Genius!"

While the previous, fourth, Zeppelin album had benefited from its huge economy with absolutely everything in its right place, *Houses Of The Holy* was less about being perfect, more about letting loose and having fun. Not everybody got it. A fact reflected in the exceedingly mixed reactions it drew from critics and fans. Similar to the fate that awaited *Led Zeppelin III*, which fell foul of having to follow the giant success of *Led Zeppelin II*, for many *Houses Of The Holy* was a letdown after the monumental achievements of its predecessor. Where there was general disappointment that the third album didn't contained anything of the stature of *Whole Lotta Love* or *Heartbreaker*, the knee-jerk reaction to *Houses Of The Holy* was that it lacked something of a similar eminence to *Stairway To Heaven* or *When The Levee Breaks*. In retrospect, however, it clearly signposted the way forward for a band now operating at their giddy peak. The days of grand-statement albums like the first, second and fourth had given way to, as Plant put it, "simple fun". An outlandish concept at a time when a band's artistic stature was still measured by how 'heavy' it was – musically, lyrically, metaphorically. In that sense, the fifth Zeppelin album was a relatively lightweight affair, and therefore, most critics argued, of little real importance.

"Several tracks on this new Led Zep album are simply bad jokes," bleated one typical review in America. Fortunately, not all reviewers were so blinkered. According to short-lived UK music paper *Let It Rock*, the album showed "increasing diversity, humour, and richness, with only moderate self-indulgence".

Fans were equally divided. While *Houses Of*

"Jonesy was a superb arranger, who could conduct an orchestra while playing bass with one hand."

Engineer Eddie Kramer

ALAMY x2

"[By 1973] we were much more ambitious... We really wanted to take the live performances as far as they could go."

Jimmy Page

The Holy became the band's third album to top the British and American charts, selling more than three million copies in the US, where symbolically it had replaced Elvis Presley's *Aloha From Hawaii* at No.1, it slipped out of the British chart after just 13 weeks, soon overtaken by its still-selling-heavily predecessor.

The obligatory single from *HOTH* in America, *Over The Hills And Far Away*, released in May, also flopped, becoming Zeppelin's first not to reach the Top 50, although *D'Yer Maker,* released six months later, got to No.20. (As usual, neither track was released as a single in the UK.)

Privately, Page fumed at this latest example of critical disdain. Peter Grant decided it was time for a change of strategy, beginning with the appointment, in time for their next US tour, of their first full-time American PR, Danny Goldberg of Solters, Roskin & Sabinson. SR&S were best known for working with film stars but had recently opened a music division, and with Goldberg having been a freelance writer for *Rolling Stone* – one of the magazines Page and Grant specifically wanted to woo – his inside knowledge made his appointment a done deal.

"Most of the journalists present seemed so shocked that we'd done this," said Page. "One of them said: 'My first question to you, Mister Page, is why are you giving me this interview in the first place?'"

The answer lay in the band's determination to see their public image upgraded and moved on to the same footing as the Stones. "Without getting too egocentric," said Plant, "we thought it was time that people heard something about us other than that we were eating women and throwing the bones out the window."

Not everything ran smoothly, of course, and Bonham had to be restrained after a *Sounds* journalist had affronted him by saying he thought him the greatest drummer in the world, and asked to shake his hand. "I've taken enough shit from you c**ts in the press!" Bonzo screamed, before launching himself at the terrified journo, offering to "give that horrible little fucker an interview he'll never forget!"

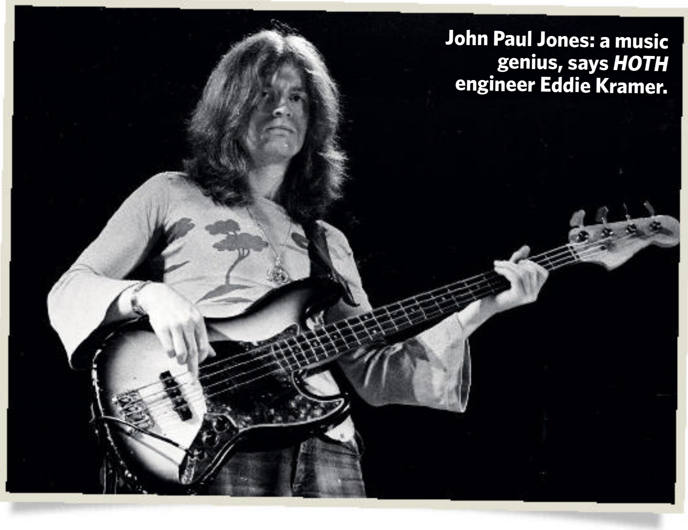
According to ELO drummer Bev Bevan, an old mate of Bonham's from Birmingham who happened to run into him in Los Angeles and was shocked by what he saw, "I think he felt he had a reputation to live up to, like Keith Moon. For every one drink I had, he'd order himself six Brandy Alexanders, just showing off, really, knocking them back one after another."

Over time, however, Zep's new PR strategy worked, resulting in *Rolling Stone* finally putting Zeppelin on its cover, with an article by their 16-year-old cub reporter Cameron Crowe.

Crowe was clearly a real-life fan, and the band treated him to one of their most revealing interviews. Page even opened up about Boleskine House, dropping hints as to its hidden purpose by referring directly to "my involvement in magic" and explaining how "I'm attracted by the unknown… all my houses are isolated… A few things have happened that would freak some people out, but I was surprised actually at how composed I was."

Page went on to say he doubted "whether I'll reach thirty-five. I can't be sure about that," but that he wasn't afraid of death. "That is the greatest mystery of all." Ultimately, he whispered: "I'm still searching for an angel with a broken wing." Then added with a grin: "It's not very easy to find them these days. Especially when you're staying at the Plaza Hotel."

The *Houses Of The Holy* US tour that summer also coincided with a total revamp of the way the band presented itself on stage. The 1973 tour would be their first to feature a professional light show, including lasers, mirror balls and dry ice, as well as a whole new set of stage costumes specially designed for each member. The most flamboyant was Page's glittering moon-and-stars outfit, the buttonless, wide-lapelled jacket flapping open, his flared trousers boasting three symbols down the side of the leg: the top symbol, like an ornate '7', representing Capricorn, his Sun sign, a bastardised 'M' ▷

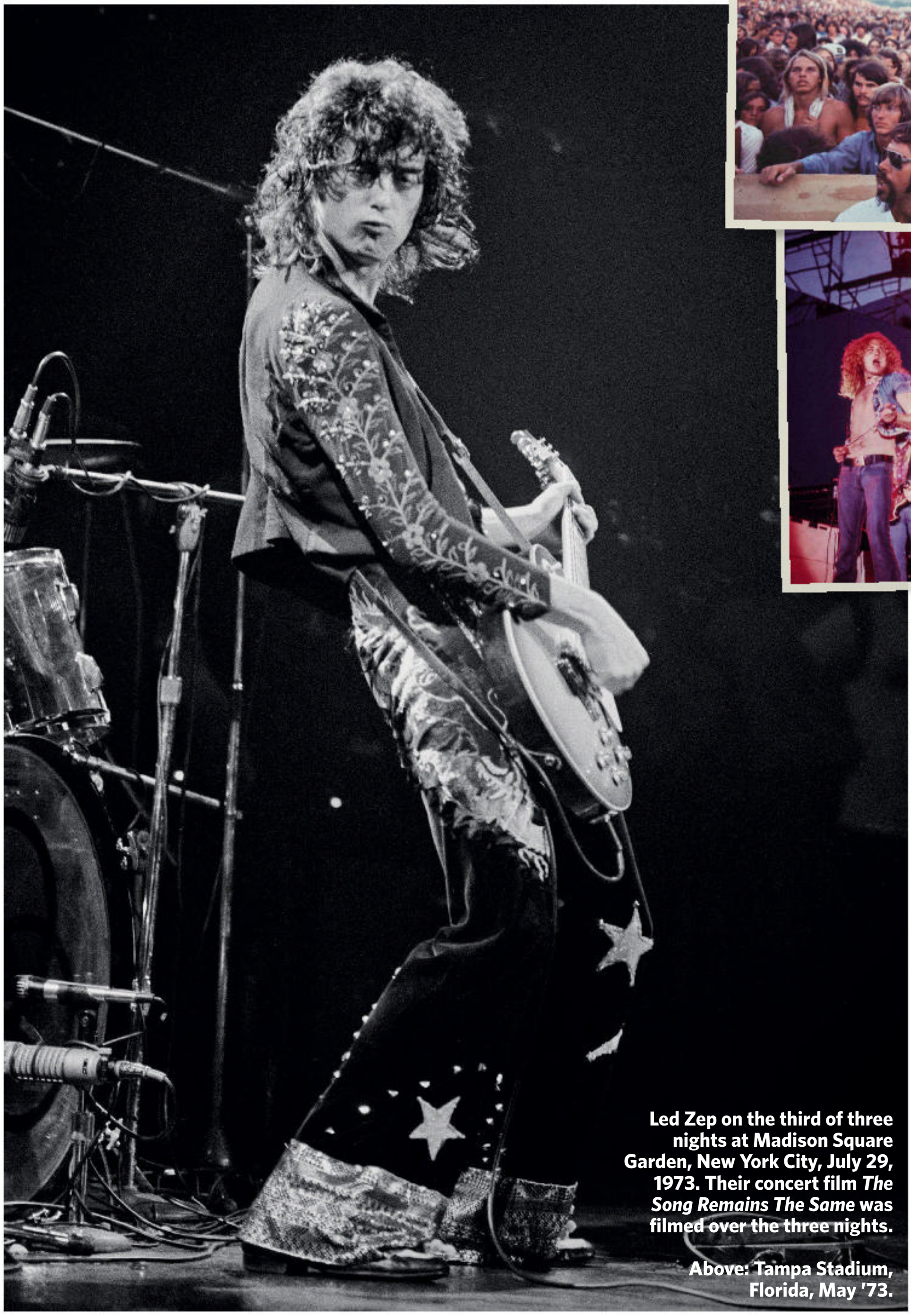


John Paul Jones: a music genius, says *HOTH* engineer Eddie Kramer.

MAIN ALAMY; INSET: GETTY

All smiles. And who could blame them. Led Zep in '73.

JAMES FORTUNE/ATLASICONS.COM



Led Zep on the third of three nights at Madison Square Garden, New York City, July 29, 1973. Their concert film *The Song Remains The Same* was filmed over the three nights.

Above: Tampa Stadium, Florida, May '73.

> **"It was hedonistic times. But the thing is the playing was always there. On maybe just a very rare occasion did it suffer."**
>
> **Jimmy Page**

representing Scorpio, his ascendant sign, and below that what looked like a '69' representing his Moon sign.

"It's a work of art, that suit," Page told me. "Originally we saw the whole essence of our live performance as something that the audience listened to very carefully, picking up on what was going on, the spontaneity and musicianship. And you can't do that if you're running around the stage all night. Or at least we couldn't back then."

By 1973, however, "we were much more ambitious, in that respect. We really wanted to take the live performances as far as they could go."

It was a similar story off stage, where Page was now going three or four nights without sleep and boasting of living on a liquid-only diet. "I knew exactly what I wanted to do," he would tell me years later. "It was hedonistic times, you know? But the thing is the playing was always there. On maybe just a very rare occasion did it suffer – a rare occasion relative to the volume of tours. But we wanted to be on that edge, it fed into the music."

Also joining them on that tour was Atlantic Records UK and European president Phil Carson, who recalls: "The rules hadn't been written yet. And even where they had, we broke them. Like when the band played a huge outdoor stadium, in Tampa, Florida, and there was nearly 60,000 people there, breaking the record set by The Beatles of 55,000 at Shea Stadium. I don't remember much about the gig other than the awesome size of the crowd. Don't forget this was for one band, not a festival bill or even a headline act with support bands. This was just Led Zeppelin on their own. I'll never forget the reaction when they came on stage. Mind-blowing!"

The '73 US tour also included a huge outdoor show at the Atlanta Braves football stadium, where a crowd of 49,236 paid to see them, beating the previous record of just over 33,000 set by The Beatles in 1965. The following night in Tampa, Florida, which Carson referenced, drew an even bigger crowd, making it the most lucrative single performance in show-business history.

As the limousine pulled up at the backstage gates, Plant turned to manager Peter Grant and said: "Fucking hell, G! Where did all these people come from?"

Speaking with Page about it years later, he recalled how "that was one of the most surprising times. I knew that we were pretty big, but I hadn't imagined it to be on that sort of scale. In fact, even now I still find it difficult to take it all in, just how much it all meant, you know?"

This was the new post-*Stairway To Heaven* world, where the children of the revolution, the new boogaloo dudes, worshipped and were ruled over by Led Zeppelin. Back when giants walked the Earth, before rules, before consequences, before anyone knew what hit them.

For Zeppelin, 1973 was also the year when Icarus flew closest to the sun, the heat generated by the *Houses Of The Holy* tour reaching its apotheosis with their sold-out three-night run at Madison Square Garden in New York in June – later immortalised in the fantastically over-the-top concert film *The Song Remains The Same*.

"For me, Madison Square Garden was a seminal moment," Plant later told me. "Until then I don't think I could ever have imagined something like that, where there was so much energy coming and going between us and the audience. It was like having a dream come true that you never knew you had. Afterwards, I thought: 'Now we know what happened to Judy Garland!'"

GETTY x3

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- Book: A 108-page book is at the heart of this collection, with an in-depth history of the band by Stephen Humphries and rare photographs from Lasse Hoile and the band's personal archives.

3rd March

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Transmission

BACK IN BUSINESS

Once red-hot property, five years ago **The Answer** found themselves out in the cold, their very existence in question, after their then-latest album failed to catch fire. Now they're hoping that with new album *Sundowners* they'll soon be bathing in the warm glow of success.

Words: **Paul Brannigan** Photos: **Rob Blackham**

'Soul-destroying' is the term Paul Mahon opts for when recalling how the band to which he'd dedicated all his adult life faded meekly, almost apologetically, into the shadows in the winter of 2017.

The guitarist is revisiting The Answer's final run of shows promoting 2016's *Solas*, the four-piece's acclaimed sixth album. It's a bold, experimental record, with its hard-rock foundations augmented by Irish traditional music and subtle electronic flourishes. Hopes back then that it might broaden the Downpatrick group's increasingly selective appeal dissipated when it failed to make it into the Top 40. Closing out the tour as special guests on Mr. Big's UK theatre tour, a booking he regarded as "a dead rubber", Mahon was acutely aware that The Answer were nearing the end of the road in more ways than one.

"When you've been around for a while, you start to recognise when things have run their course," he reflects quietly. "I was definitely of the mind that that was it."

Fourteen months earlier, when they were talking to this writer on the eve of the release of *Solas*, their mood was upbeat and decidedly bullish. While acknowledging that the group's career trajectory had dipped below industry projections – "You need the stars to align," frontman Cormac Neeson observed sagely, and without bitterness, "and sometimes it happens and sometimes it doesn't" – they still exhibited the confidence and swagger of a band secure in the belief that their day would come. "We're not yet at the stage where we're sitting in our armchairs drinking Guinness and reminiscing about the good old days," Neeson insisted.

With hindsight, though – and we take no joy in pointing this out – *Classic Rock*'s perceptive review of *Solas* foreshadowed the sense of disillusionment to come. Ian Fortnam wrote: "The Answer are established as a band whose albums reliably stall in the UK chart's mid-40s. When *Classic Rock*'s Best New Band of 2005 picked up their award they expected more than this. We all did."

On the Mr. Big tour, The Answer's uninspired 40-minute sets indulged with polite applause served as nightly requiems for the four men's shared dreams. And, as Mahon now admits, the hollowness of the experience only added to a deepening and inescapable sense of bathos.

"We scaled some great heights, but after twenty years we were kinda left with nothing at the end of it," is his brutally honest assessment. "It felt like everyone was already looking to what the next thing might be. It was a bit of a wake-up call: welcome to the real world." ▷

Here comes the *Sundowners*: The Answer working on their latest album.

"Mate, these fuckers are going to come back with an absolute bang!"

It's May 27, 2020, and Mark Alexander-Erber, president and founder of Golden Robot Records, home to Frank Carter And The Rattlesnakes, former Whitesnake/Thin Lizzy guitarist John Sykes, Rose Tattoo and more, is talking to Canadian music writer and podcast host Mitch Lafon about the label's newest signing.

By their own admission, no one was more surprised by the Australian label reaching out to The Answer with the promise of a new worldwide deal than the band themselves. But Alexander-Erber is a long-time fan – the label boss talked of listening to their debut album *Rise* during his gym workouts a decade ago – and the offer prompted frank and open-hearted discussions among the band, completed by bassist Micky Waters and drummer James Heatley, who all now have children and independent businesses.

"One of the reasons we needed to take a break was because The Answer has always needed to be 'all in'. It doesn't work unless all four members are fully committed," says Neeson. "Personally, to go from The Answer being such a massive part of my everyday life to it being put on the back burner was a really weird sensation. And it was kinda scary, because it was very much uncharted territory, insomuch as we had never really taken a break from when we were eighteen years of age, so it took a lot of readjustment, from a head-space point of view as much as anything.

"But it wasn't like we took a break because we were throwing beers at each other's heads, it wasn't a case of 'I can't stand the sight of you any more'. The very deep friendships we've built up over the years weren't ever going to go away. I'm pretty sure that there was never a point where I thought there *wouldn't* be a seventh record from The Answer. But life changes, and obviously I would have understood had one of the others decided that, for whatever reason, they couldn't commit as before."

Their decision, however, was unanimous: let's do this.

The Answer's first studio jam in three years took place in August 2019, the same month as their new record deal with Golden Robot Records was formally announced.

> **"We scaled some great heights, but after twenty years we were kinda left with nothing at the end of it."**
>
> **Paul Mahon**

Perhaps understandably, the session was initially "pretty slow going", as Mahon recalls – "We were at this for twenty years non-stop, and you quickly realise that after you take a long time out, momentum doesn't build again overnight" – but there was excitement and energy in the room from day one. Another session was held in October 2019, and a third in February 2020. Which meant that when the world shut down one month later, The Answer were in good shape, and Alexander-Erber had already been sent a clutch of work-in-progress demos he regarded as "bangers".

"It felt like the chemistry was really back," says Mahon. "Maybe better than ever."

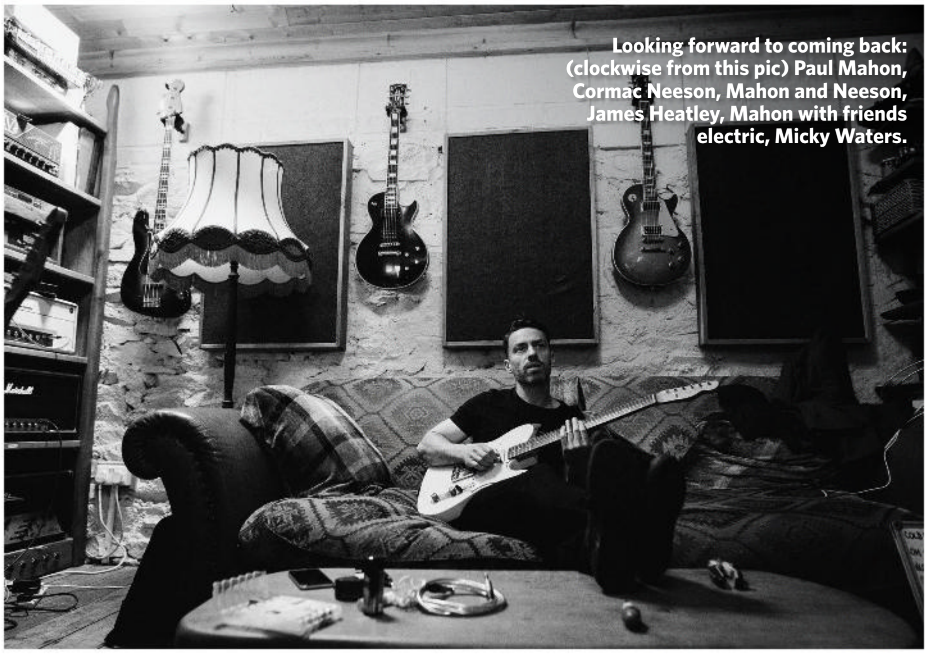
Work resumed, sporadically, over Zoom calls. And looking back, Neeson, Mahon and Waters all recall the process being more "efficient" than the band's traditional rehearsal-room jams.

"In some ways," says Neeson, "even though the process was weird because of lockdown, the lack of time-pressure meant we could let things develop organically. It sorta felt like we were writing our first record all over again, back when we didn't have a record label and we didn't have management in our ears or have any of the pressures that come with being a working band."

"We've been playing together since we were teenagers," says a smiling Micky Waters, "so we know what we're doing."

That much is evident from a first listen to the band's new album. Put simply, *Sundowners*, produced by Dan Weller (Enter Shikari, Those Damn Crows) at Middle Farm studio in Devon and set for release (in the UK) by 7Hz Productions on Saint Patrick's Day, March 17, is the definitive Answer album; the most cohesive, impactful and best collection of songs they have ever put their name to. Neeson says the 11-track record is "the album we've been waiting to make our whole lives", and that sense of excitement runs right through the record from top to tail.

You may already be familiar with its two teaser singles – the dirty-groove blues rock of *Blood Brother* and the recently released hard-funk stomper *Want You To Love Me* – but they only ▷



Looking forward to coming back: (clockwise from this pic) Paul Mahon, Cormac Neeson, Mahon and Neeson, James Heatley, Mahon with friends electric, Micky Waters.

partially hint at the majesty of the record as a whole. The atmospheric Zeppelin/Stones hybrid title track rolls out with a filthy bass line, greasy slide guitar and Neeson in full-blooded voice; *California Rust* is a sublime retro groove accented by female gospel vocals; *Living On The Line* is a kissing cousin of The Black Crowes' *Sting Me* ("a chance for me to live out my wildest Paul Rodgers dreams," Neeson says with a laugh); *Get On Back* channels Curtis Mayfield; and unity anthem *All Together* takes it cues from Stevie Wonder and Stax Records soul. The album closes with the fabulous *Always Alright*, which opens with a rootsy Americana feel (not unlike the highlights of Neeson's criminally underrated solo album *White Feather*), then shifts gears entirely ("moving from Chris Stapleton to The Who", reckons Neeson) with stacked gospel vocals, a killer keyboard vamp and stunning guitar playing from Mahon. *Sundowners* might well be the best new hard rock record you'll hear in 2023.

"A good friend of ours listened to it with Cormac, and he texted me and said: 'Congratulations, you've finally made your *Sticky Fingers*,'" Mahon says, with understandable pride.

"*Sundowners* is the album we've been waiting to make our whole lives."

Cormac Neeson

"Thinking about it, that makes sense, because *Sticky Fingers* is the album where the Stones really distilled everything they'd learned, and everything that defined them. It's also my favourite Stones record. So I'll take that all day long."

"I think this album has greatly benefitted from us having made *Solas*," Neeson adds. "Because with this record we sorta set out to re-establish our core values, but at the same time not play it safe.

"Going left-field with *Solas* has given us a really clear idea of where those core values lie, but also gave us a really good taste for the experimental and given us even more trust in our gut instincts. When we said that we were coming back, we could really tell that people had no idea what kind of record was coming, because of *Solas*. And we love that, because one of the things we wanted to achieve with that was to shake ourselves out of any pigeonhole. It's good to keep people guessing, because what we have here [with *Sundowners*] is going to surprise a lot of people in the best possible way."

On December 3 last year, The Answer took to the stage together for the first time since November 2017, playing as special guests to Black Star Riders at the Planet Rockstock weekender in Wales,where they previewed four new songs from their forthcoming album.

"That was… pretty weird, to be honest," Micky Waters says, laughing. "It was like: 'Oh, yeah, this is what we do!'"

"We went through every emotion," Mahon admits. "It was nerve-racking, it was emotional, and it probably took us about five or six songs before we could look at one another and think: 'Right, okay, we're back in business.'"

"There was such an outpouring of positive energy for the band that night," says Neeson. "It felt special. And the album feels special. With where we're at in the world right now, hopefully it can provide a release, and energise and empower people the way it has energised us.

"I think we need this album more than anybody else does," he says plainly. "But it feels like there's a lot of love out there for the band, and hopefully we've done people proud with this record. Right from the outset, from the first writing sessions, you could feel that all four members of the band were deeply passionate about what we were doing, and you can feel the collective soul of the band in every song. It's an explosion of positive energy created by four brothers who just really missed each other."

Ask Neeson, Mahon and Waters what success will look like with *Sundowners*, and all three are united in the answer: "To us it's already a success," says Mahon.

"We just want to get out and play it now," he adds, admitting to feeling just a little frustration that the world has yet to hear why The Answer are so buoyant once more. "Hopefully when we get back out in front of people properly again we can conjure up some of that excitement and energy that we all felt on *Rise*. Right now we're all fired up and excited again, and if we still have the same hunger and desire and optimism at the end of this cycle, who knows where we can go from here."

Sundowners is out on March 17 via Golden Robot Records and 7Hz.

SIX PACK

The Answer: the essential tracks. Listen and fall in love again.

COME FOLLOW ME
***Rise*, 2006**

That riff! That voice! A signature Answer anthem, a unifying call-to-arms that signposted the Downpatrick band's hunger to kick-start a new wave of globe-conquering classic rock.

KEEP BELIEVING
***Rise (Special Edition)*, 2007**

Inexplicably left off The Answer's debut album (although appended to its subsequent two-disc reissue) the band's first commercially available single was a brilliant statement of intent, its teasing, bubbling intro giving way to a riff-heavy banger, like Free rewired for a new generation.

NOWHERE FREEWAY
***Revival*, 2011**

The Answer's most streamed track on Spotify is a soaring, transcendent powerhouse duet between Neeson and former Saint Jude vocalist Lynne Jackaman. Incidentally, it's also the Answer song most loved by frontman Cormac Neeson's sons.

SPECTACULAR
***New Horizon*, 2013**

Promoted by a surprisingly raunchy NSFW house-party video, the groovy, hooky, infectious *Spectacular* seemed to have 'worldwide smash' stamped all over it. Sadly it did fuck-all commercially, not even when it was reworked beautifully in acoustic samba form for the 2014 football World Cup.

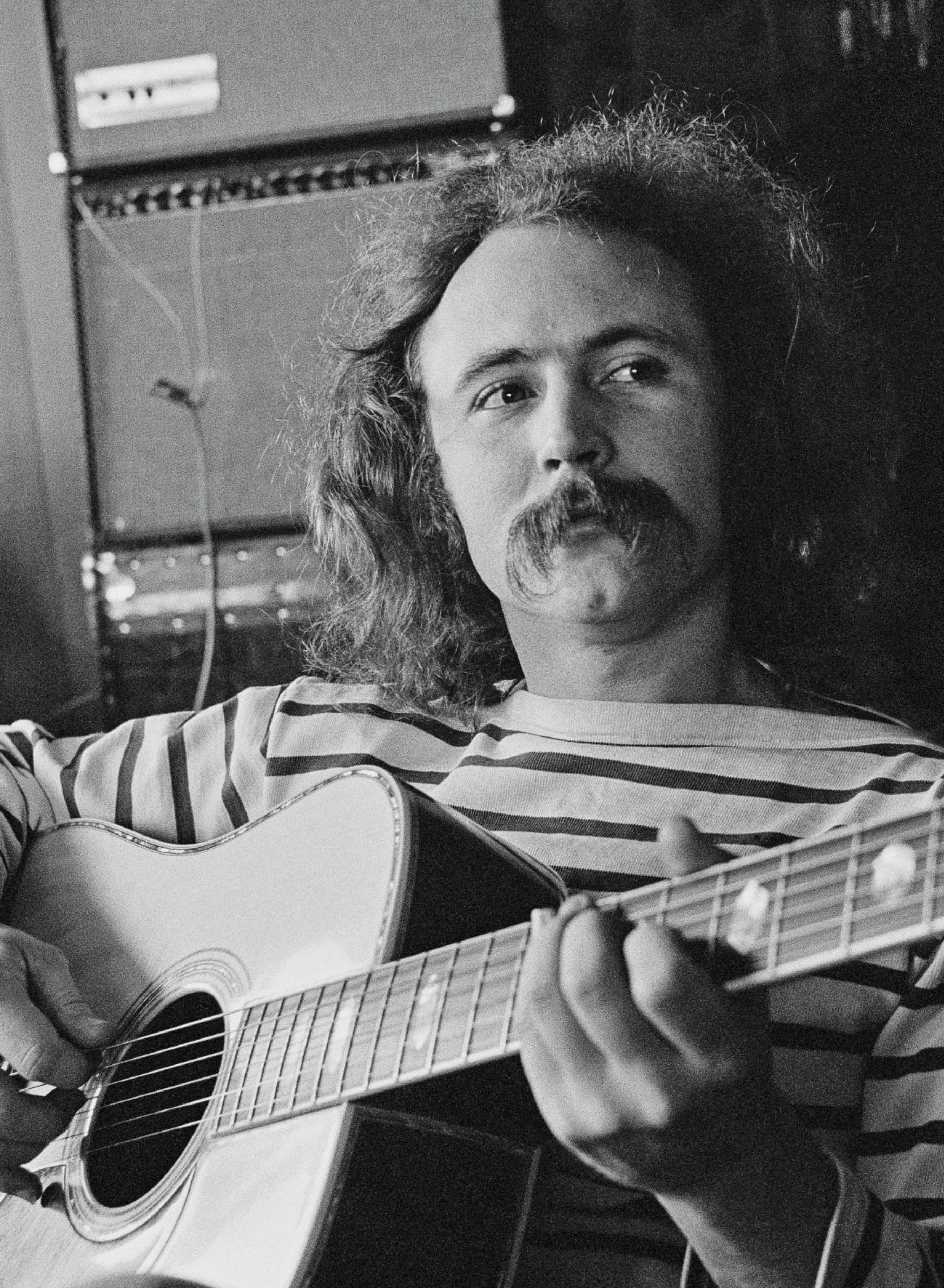
SOLAS
***Solas*, 2016**

The brooding, atmospheric, trip-hop and Celtic folk-flavoured title track of The Answer's sixth studio album plays out like a film soundtrack theme, and demonstrated that the band could not be pigeonholed as retro-rock Luddites.

ALWAYS ALRIGHT
***Sundowners*, 2023**

The stunning climax of The Answer's magnificent new albums sounds like *Screamadelica*-era Primal Scream, The Black Crowes circa *Southern Harmony* and The Who all at once, and signals that the boys are back in town.

Marshall
Gain
Bass
Middle
Treble
Volume
DRIVE MASTER
Gain
Tone
Volume
BLUES BREAKER®
Gain
Bass
Contour
Treble
Volume
SHRED MASTER
GAIN
BASS
MIDDLE
TREBLE
LEVEL
Marshall
The Guv'nor
THE LEGENDS ARE BACK.
MARSHALL.COM/PEDALS



HENRY DILTZ/GETTY

DAVID CROSBY

August 14, 1941 – January 18, 2023

We look back at the life and times of the man who, with The Byrds, CSN, CSN&Y and solo, wrote and recorded some of the unforgettable music that was part of the glittering soundtrack to a golden era.

Words: **Simon Harper**

"What the hell is wrong with freedom, man? That's what it's all about," asserted Billy, Dennis Hopper's wide-eyed, mononymous anti-hero in search of America during a memorable scene in the groundbreaking 1969 road movie *Easy Rider*.

Billy – along with Wyatt, his travelling companion, played by Peter Fonda – represents the hedonistic and rebellious cult of youth, endeavouring to survive in a straight and intolerant society. That Hopper, also the film's director, chose to model his adventuring and idealistic character – complete with a drooping walrus moustache, shoulder-length hair and fringed jacket – on David Crosby was testament to the pervading influence the free-spirited countercultural icon held on a generation at the tail end of that revolutionary decade.

When *Easy Rider* was released in July that year, *Crosby, Stills & Nash*, the self-titled debut album from the supergroup trio who would spearhead the gilded Californian scene that would dominate the early 70s, were only two months old, but already the band's co-founder David Crosby (looking every bit the happily stoned blueprint for Billy on the album's cover) was considered an outspoken, anti-authoritarian, puckish prince of the hippie era.

It was a role in which Crosby thrived, where an imperial appetite for sex, drugs, and rock'n'roll was fulfilled beyond excess alongside a nagging predilection for contention – through the years, the brunt of his raw distemper would be especially felt by politicians, lesser pop stars and, most notably, his own bandmates. But it was his voice – that rich, mellifluous, gliding expression of his soul – that truly set him apart, endeared him to the world's greatest talents, and endured to the very end.

By the time of his death, aged 81, in January 2023, Croz – as he was affectionately known – was an elder statesman of music, a Grammy Award-winning, two-time inductee into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame (as part of The Byrds and CSN), whose twilight streak of wonderful solo albums more than made up for the wilderness years that preceded them. He was a quick-witted, acid-tongued Twitter raconteur, attracting new followers across generations with his honest assessments of their joint-rolling skills.

"I've always said that I picked up the guitar as a shortcut to sex."

David Crosby

His artistic revival, however, was not without its share of personal torment. Beset with health and financial hardships stemming from the depths of his addictions, the mercurial Croz died estranged from the peers with whom he created his greatest works. His freedom, it seemed, had come at a price.

Roger McGuinn was wary of Crosby from the moment their professional paths chanced to meet. A folk guitarist formerly of the Chad Mitchell Trio who had rocked the Greenwich Village scene by infusing traditional ballads with a Beatles beat, McGuinn had moved to Los Angeles and hooked up with Gene Clark, fresh from his stint in the New Christy Minstrels, to forge this new folk-rock vision as a duo, but quickly realised the similar tone of their voices meant a third singer would be required, and

Crosby at a recording session with The Byrds in 1965.

Love is in the air: Crosby and Joni Mitchell.

The Byrds, August 1965: (l-r) David Crosby, Chris Hillman, Roger McGuinn, Gene Clark, Michael Clarke.

actively began looking for a new member. They found him at the Troubadour club in West Hollywood in early 1964.

"This guy is on stage who comes on very arrogant and kind of like puts the audience down," Clark recalled in Crosby's 1989 autobiography *Long Time Gone*. "I said: 'Who is this guy?' Roger said: 'I know him.' He didn't want to talk about it. Then the guy sang and I was just blown away. I said: 'Man, is he good! That's it. You can't ask for any better than that.' McGuinn said: 'No, man. I know David. We tried to work together. It's impossible. It'll never work.'"

Crosby had harboured his own folk aspirations, launching his performing career in Santa Barbara as a duo with his elder brother, Ethan, before striking out alone for New York, where he would first encounter McGuinn. Back in his native LA, Crosby approached McGuinn and Clark with the proposal of joining them, adding the sweetener that his friend Jim Dickson had a recording studio they could use. It was an offer McGuinn couldn't refuse.

In the months that followed, the group, under Dickson's management, were enhanced by the addition of Chris Hillman on bass and Michael Clarke on drums, and their new collective moniker: The Byrds. Their scrappy conception was played out on the stages of California clubs, indebted to the insolent, long-haired impact of the Rolling Stones, until a breakthrough came in the form of their debut single, released in April 1965: a jangly, electrified take on Bob Dylan's *Mr. Tambourine Man*.

Suddenly The Byrds were a phenomenon. Their chiming brand of folk rock swept the airwaves as America fought back against the British Invasion. The *Mr. Tambourine Man* album, dominated by Dylan covers and Gene Clark originals, established the group as pioneers of the emerging West Coast sound, which in turn would surface in the strains of The Beatles' *Rubber Soul*. McGuinn may have taken the lion's share of lead vocals, but standing in the group's front line brandishing honeyed harmonies through a beatific smile, Crosby was a radiant star-in-waiting. "That was when we started making money," he recalled. "Then I bought a new green Porsche. That's when I started realising that the sixties were going to be interesting times."

A life in the spotlight wasn't such a far-fetched prospect for Crosby. His parents, both of whom were from an upper-class New York society background (his mother, Aliph Van Cortlandt Whitehead, was a descendent of the politically prominent Van Cortlandt dynasty), had moved to Los Angeles to follow the cinematographic ambitions of his father, Floyd Crosby – a decision validated by his Academy Award for cinematography in 1931. Ethan, born in 1937, was followed four years later by David, who would grow up on the Hollywood sets his father shot on. "I was always a showbiz kid," Croz later conceded.

Music was a binding force in the Crosby household, where the family would regularly gather in song, with Floyd on mandolin, Ethan on guitar, Aliph singing and David providing his first harmonies. But even these communal performances did little to tether the increasingly provocative behaviour that saw a teenage David ejected from a string of exclusive private schools, and was exacerbated after his parents split in the late 1950s. A new world was opened to David upon being taught a few chords on guitar by his brother, and seeing what delights the local jazz clubs, at which Ethan played, had on offer.

"I've always said that I picked up the guitar as a shortcut to sex," Croz wrote. And, sure enough, the budding folkie pursued girls with a vengeance, until his promiscuous proclivities landed him in hot water. Learning that he'd got a girlfriend pregnant, Croz left California, and embarked on the musical journey that would eventually lead to his fateful union with McGuinn and Clark.

The Byrds were restlessly creative, keenly exploring different musical avenues in their first few glorious years to wondrous effect. Folk rock gave way to jazz, country and Indian influences, producing the earliest traces of what would become psychedelia. Songs like *Eight Miles High*, *Mr. Spaceman*, and *5D (Fifth Dimension)* demonstrated the group's remarkably progressive nature in their sonic expanse.

After chief songwriter Clark quit in February 1966, it allowed the other Byrds to flourish as composers. Crosby would collaborate with McGuinn to write stellar tracks such as the be-bop-raga *I See You* on that year's *Fifth Dimension* album, and the wistful Summer of Love anthem *Renaissance Fair* on 1967's *Younger Than Yesterday*, but his own works proved a keener insight into his creative development, where enigmatic lyrics,

"When it comes to expressing infectious enthusiasm, he is probably the most capable person I know."

Joni Mitchell on David Crosby

GETTY x3

An out-take from the shoot for the *Crosby, Stills & Nash* album cover: (l-r) Graham Nash, Stephen Stills, David Crosby.

HENRY DILTZ/GETTY

"He was a giant of a musician, and his harmonic sensibilities were nothing short of genius."

Stephen Stills

atypical tunings and free rhythms reflected his penchant for pushing boundaries. *Everybody's Been Burned* is the hauntingly beautiful closer to the first side of *Younger Than Yesterday*, while *Mind Gardens* evoked the ruminations of an acid trip. Crosby's songs were innovative, interesting and profound, and gave him the confidence to wrestle for creative control of The Byrds, a power struggle that would falter against the steadfast McGuinn and Hillman, who would often rebuff his material.

"I wasn't real happy about my role in the group," Crosby wrote of this time. "I was starting to write good songs. I had written a couple of things that made me proud and nothing was happening with them… I had a large ego and Roger and I started having conflicts with each other over material, business, expenses… everything we did was a potential source of disagreement."

Crosby was fired from The Byrds in October 1967. Their arguments over songs had come to a head (the group particularly disliked his *Triad*, a song about a three-way relationship), while Crosby's rant about his JFK conspiracy theory at that summer's Monterey Pop Festival hadn't helped matters. "It hurt like hell," Croz would later admit.

Around this time, Croz met Joni Mitchell and, astounded by her abilities, offered to produce her debut album, *Song To A Seagull*. "David was wonderful company and a great appreciator," Mitchell said in *Long Time Gone*. "When it comes to expressing infectious enthusiasm, he is probably the most capable person I know. His eyes were like star sapphires to me. When he laughed they seemed to twinkle like no one else's…" The pair were romantically involved for a short while, but Crosby remained an active supporter and patron of Mitchell for the rest of his life.

It was, in fact, in Mitchell's Laurel Canyon kitchen that the next chapter of Crosby's career was born. He'd been meeting regularly to jam with friend Stephen Stills, whose band Buffalo Springfield had imploded in the spring of 1968. One day that July, the pair were visiting Mitchell when her new boyfriend Graham Nash arrived. Nash was the guitarist and a vocalist with English pop group The Hollies, and though the three had previously met in passing, this was the first time they'd formally shared company. Soon, Crosby and Stills were previewing the duet they'd practised for Stills's new song *You Don't Have To Cry*. An impressed Nash asked them to play it a second time, and then again, only this time he joined in, adding a third, soaring layer to their weaving vocal harmonies. The resulting sound was, to all present, immediately epiphanic. "We knew what we were going to be doing for the next few years, right there," Croz recalled in the 2019 documentary *David Crosby: Remember My Name*, when he revisited the historic house.

Once Nash had broken free of The Hollies, Crosby, Stills & Nash was officially born. Their democratic choice of band name was a reaction to the artistically stifling confines each had felt in their former groups. "The whole idea of starting the group in the ▷

STARS PAY TRIBUTE

"David is gone, but his music lives on. The soul of CSNY, David's voice and energy were at the heart of our band. His great songs stood for what we believed in and it was always fun and exciting when we got to play together. 'Almost Cut My Hair' 'Dejavu', and so many other great songs he wrote were wonderful to jam on and Stills and I had a blast as he kept us going on and on. His singing with Graham was so memorable, their duo spot a highlight of so many of our shows.
"We had so many great times, especially in the early years. Crosby was a very supportive friend in my early life, as we bit off big pieces of our experience together. David was the catalyst of many things.
"My heart goes out to Jan and Django, his wife and son. Lots of love to you. Thanks David for your spirit and songs. Love you man. I remember the best times!"
Neil Young

"It is with a deep and profound sadness that I learned that my friend David Crosby has passed. I know people tend to focus on how volatile our relationship has been at times, but what has always mattered to David and me more than anything was the pure joy of the music we created together, the sound we discovered with one another, and the deep friendship we shared over all these many long years.
"David was fearless in life and in music. He leaves behind a tremendous void as far as sheer personality and talent in this world. He spoke his mind, his heart, and his passion through his beautiful music and leaves an incredible legacy. These are the things that matter most. My heart is truly with his wife, Jan, his son, Django, and all of the people he has touched in this world."
Graham Nash

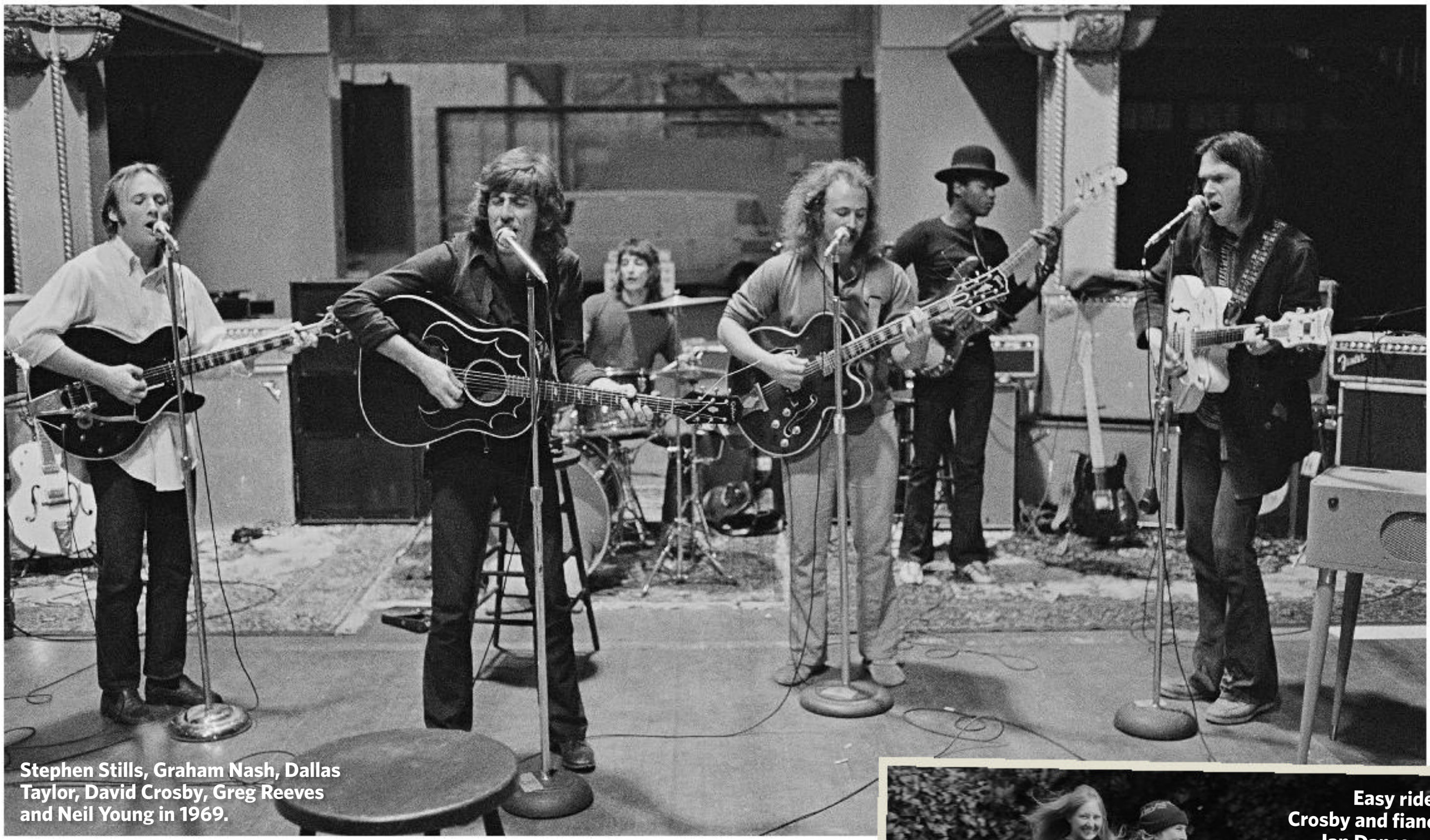
"We sang together, we played together and had great times together. I'll miss The Croz more than words can say. Sail on."
David Gilmour

"I don't know what to say other than I'm heartbroken to hear about David Crosby. David was an unbelievable talent – such a great singer and songwriter. And a wonderful person. I am at a loss for words."
Brian Wilson

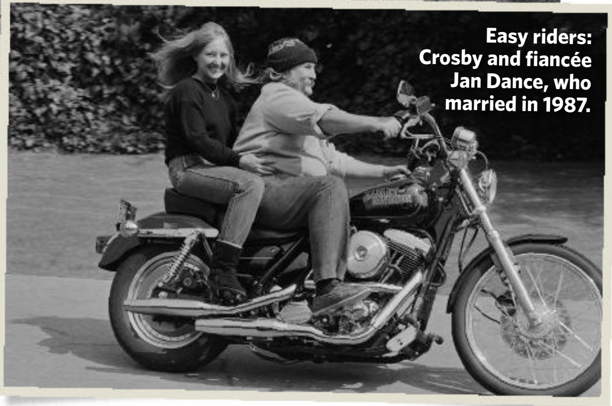
"I can't begin to say how influential Crosby, Stills and Nash were for me. I'm grateful David Crosby lived, and so very sad he's gone."
Roseanne Cash

"I was honoured to know him and work with CSN. No words for this feeling except sadness right now. My thoughts are with his wife Jan, son Django and the CSNY family. We love you David."
Peter Frampton

"He gave me the gift of family. I will forever be grateful to him, Django, and Jan. His music and legacy will inspire many generations to come. A true treasure. I will miss you my friend."
Melissa Etheridge



Stephen Stills, Graham Nash, Dallas Taylor, David Crosby, Greg Reeves and Neil Young in 1969.



Easy riders: Crosby and fiancée Jan Dance, who married in 1987.

"I let those guys down terribly when I became a junkie. They watched their band go all to shit because I couldn't pull my weight."

David Crosby

first place," Croz explained in his documentary, "was to build a mothership group that would allow us the freedom to do what we wanted to do."

CSN duly signed to Atlantic Records, and their self-titled debut album was released in May 1969. It arrived at the perfect time; the previous year Bob Dylan's *John Wesley Harding* and The Band's *Music From Big Pink* had signalled a sea change that washed away the pretences of psychedelia and inflated blues rock in favour of a pastoral, acoustic sound that allowed for more introspection – CSN's sumptuous, intricate melodies and mellow contemplations were to prove irresistible in this climate.

On the album, the romantically poetic *Guinnevere* was Crosby's, as was *Long Time Gone*, an emphatic response to Robert Kennedy's assassination. *Wooden Ships*, a co-write with Stills and Jefferson Airplane's Paul Kantner, was born in the chilling shadow of the Vietnam War. These songs, and the remainder of *Crosby, Stills & Nash*, propelled the album into the US Top 10, sparking a thrilling and influential 70s success story that would be plagued by simmering tensions.

Neil Young, ex-guitarist with Buffalo Springfield, was brought into the fold that summer to alleviate former bandmate Stills's multi-instrument duties, and in August the new quartet played their second gig, at the Woodstock festival. Work had begun on CSNY's first album, *Déjà Vu*, when Crosby's life was upturned by tragedy.

On September 30, Christine Hinton, Croz's 21-year-old girlfriend and the subject of *Guinnevere*, died in a car crash. He was summoned to the hospital to identify her body. "He was never the same again," Nash once disclosed. Croz would later acknowledge that that horrifying experience and the ensuing grief sent him spiralling into depression and a dependency on hard drugs to numb the pain that would take years to conquer. "I got involved in [heroin] because I was in a great deal of pain emotionally and it seems to help you through that," Croz told *Classic Rock* in 2006. "What it actually does is stuff it. And stuffing emotional trauma doesn't deal with it at all, it just festers. Which is what happened."

Déjà Vu was an unquestionable smash hit. Released in March 1970, despite the incessant internal wrangling that threatened to derail sessions, and the dark mood that permeated the music, it was certified Gold in just two weeks. With *Almost Cut My Hair*, Croz sealed his reputation as the consummate hippie, unfurling his 'freak flag' in typical defiance.

Their supergroup status confirmed, CSNY reigned at the dawn of the new decade and reaped the rewards. But even millions of dollars couldn't abate the ego clashes that exploded within the group, and in early 1971 they went on hiatus. It was to be the first of many break-ups in their 40-year saga.

From their reconciliation in 1973 to their final, inexorable split around 2016, the members of CSNY played in every configuration and to various degrees of success (Crosby and Nash enjoyed regular collaborations). Neil Young effectively severed ties with Crosby in 2014 after Croz made disparaging remarks about Young's wife, Daryl Hannah. In 2016, even an exasperated Nash followed suit. But in spite of all their differences, all members remained

Crosby, his son James Raymond and drummer Jeff Pevar with their band CPR.

MAIN: HENRY DILTZ/GETTY; GETTY x2

Latter day CSNY at Neil Young's Bridge School Benefit Concert, October 26, 2013.

"What has always mattered to David and me more than anything was the pure joy of the music we created together."

Graham Nash

open to the possibility that one day they might reunite for the sake of music. Crosby's death means that will now never happen.

Away from the volatile culture of CSNY, in early 1971 Croz initiated an autonomous solo career with the release of *If Only I Could Remember My Name*. The album's sessions were musical therapy for a mourning Croz, where his songs and improvisations were embellished with the reassuring support of friends including Nash, Young, Paul Kantner, Joni Mitchell, and the Grateful Dead's Jerry Garcia, who played a considerable and consolatory role in its creation.

The lush, kaleidoscopic qualities of songs like *Laughing*, *Song With No Words* and *I'd Swear There Was Somebody There* made for an enchanting, ethereal aural experience, but it certainly wasn't commercial, and the album practically disappeared after a critical mauling. By the turn of the new millennium, however, as Devendra Banhart and Joanna Newsom's idiosyncratic stylings heralded the 'New Weird America' tag, *If Only*… underwent a reappraisal that rightly saw it exalted to cult status, and is now considered Crosby's masterpiece. Nevertheless, after its initial release it would be 18 years before Croz would get his shit together again and record another album under his own name.

Drugs were the root of Crosby's downward trajectory. Heroin had been supplemented by a devastating addiction to crack cocaine, which consumed his thoughts and finances in the early 80s, rendering him useless to his band. "I let those guys down terribly when I became a junkie," he said. "I went right down the tubes in front of them, and they watched their band go all to shit because I couldn't pull my weight."

After a number of arrests on drugs and firearms charges, and repeated desertions from rehab programmes arranged by what friends were left supporting him, Croz's nadir came in 1986 when an unsuccessful appeal for an earlier conviction led to five months in a Texas prison. "A horrible place," Croz told *Classic Rock*. "People die there. Every day… It was a helluva place to try and kick cocaine and heroin at the same time, which is what happened."

Croz cleaned up, and in 1987 married girlfriend Jan Dance, herself emerging from her own drug ordeal. The marriage lasted until his death, and produced a son, Django, in 1995. Later that decade Crosby fathered (via sperm donation) two children for Melissa Etheridge and her then partner Julie Cypher.

But there were traumas to come. Croz was indebted to the Internal Revenue Service, and the impact of drugs on his health was serious. In 1994 he was diagnosed with hepatitis C, and underwent a liver transplant. Ten years later he developed type 2 diabetes. Soon after, he was in hospital for major cardiac surgery. In 2020 he lost one of Etheridge's children, Beckett, who was just 21 and had been struggling with opioid addiction.

Musically, though, Croz was back on track. Aside from the ongoing CSN activity (*American Dream* and *Live It Up* were released in '88 and '90 ▷

"David Crosby stuck to his guns. A difficult and gifted man. Whose talent and taste was immense. His harmonious voice still echoes in Laurel Canyon. A proud man who said what he said, and felt what he felt with no apology. A brilliant songwriter, and an American Icon, RIP."
Michael Des Barres

"RIP David Crosby. As a member of The Byrds, 1 of the historically essential Artists that created the Artform of Rock. The Byrds, Bob Dylan, Beatles, Stones, Kinks, Who, Beach Boys & Yardbirds, showed future generations like us what was possible. We owe him, and them, everything"
Steven Van Zant

"Sad to hear of the passing of the legendary David Crosby. A part of so many of Rock's first Super Groups: The Byrds, CSN & CSNY… He was such an outspoken figure (often controversially) but always a musical legend."
Mike Portnoy

"David Crosby was the most vital Byrd – by all accounts, trouble to himself and those around him; but the most vivid and creative of that musical tribe. Because David did such a great job in pulling himself out of the narcotic vortex in the late 1980s he seemed like he'd be around forever. It's disturbing that he's gone, almost as much as it's sad: people like Crosby were built to endure, the way their love of music does. So even 81 seems too soon for him to be called away. Rave on, David."
Robyn Hitchcock

"David Crosby was among the monster group icons who continued a solo career with the kind of success reserved for great musicians. And he could sing the hell out of a harmony.
"He was also a friend to me. He was always, I repeat, always, present for me, to defend my character and politics, and often included over the top (sometimes unwarranted) praise. He was funny, clever, and refreshing to be around. And I was honoured that he chose my portrait of him as his last album cover. He will be missed by millions, including myself. Sending my love to Jan and his family."
Joan Baez

"It's very sad to have David Crosby leave us, but then he didn't really as we have a half century of his music to keep us warm. He was not only a one of a kind songwriter, a committed warrior for justice and an amazing singer, but also a great friend and the first famous musician to support and promote my songwriting and that of Jackson Browne. So sorry Jan. You are both on my friends forever list."
JD Souther

"David Crosby changed the landscape of music as a solo artist and as a member of The Byrds, CSN, and CSNY. I didn't know David very well but I cherish the one time we played together. It was a huge moment for me to duet with David on "Almost Cut My Hair" and to sing Stephen Stills' part on "Find the Cost of Freedom" along with him and Graham. I'll never forget it. Thanks David, from millions of us, for your contribution to the world of music. It is a huge one."
Warren Haynes

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David Crosby in 2018.

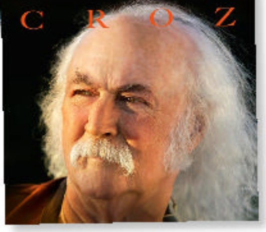
"[When The Byrds started making money] I bought a new green Porsche. That's when I realised that the sixties were going to be interesting times."

David Crosby

respectively), he had renewed his solo work, returning with the middling *Oh Yes I Can* in 1989. In the early 90s, James Raymond entered Crosby's life. Raymond, the son of the girlfriend he had abandoned in 1961, had inherited his father's musical inclinations, and the pair began a fruitful and symbiotic working relationship together. "He's a better musician than I am – by a considerable amount," Croz told *Classic Rock*. "He came to me in such a generous and kind way. And has been such a good friend to me."

Father and son joined guitarist Jeff Pevar in a new group, CPR. Although they disbanded in 2004, Raymond remained Crosby's musical director and closest collaborator henceforth. He wrote more than half and played on all of *Croz*, the respectable 2014 album that kick-started a creative streak in Crosby, which produced a run of acclaimed albums.

The excellent *Lighthouse* in 2016 teamed Croz with fusion instrumentalists Snarky Puppy's Michael League who, in his role as producer, brought in vocalists Becca Stevens and Michelle Willis. So impressed was he by their combined talents, Croz incorporated them as The Lighthouse Band, who became his touring unit, and in 2018 played equal parts in delivering the celebrated *Here If You Listen*, on which their shimmering harmonies and exquisite musicianship were demonstrated to such magical effect.



It was later that year that this writer had the pleasure of meeting Croz in person, interviewing him backstage before a show in London. He had such a benign presence – a charming Buddha-like sage on the venue's leather couch, sharing with me advice on parenthood and hard life lessons he'd learned from his tumultuous history. But behind his warm joviality I could detect a tangible sadness. His lack of earnings from record sales and no CSN income had put Croz in the resentful predicament of having to work for a living at 77.

His fortunes, which deteriorated further during the covid restrictions, were reversed in early 2021 when he sold the publishing rights of his catalogue, which saved him from ruin. It also allowed him to enjoy making music for pleasure again, and *For Free*, his eighth and, ultimately, last solo record, was released that July. It was, *Classic Rock* noted, "the sound of Crosby finally at ease with himself".

When I spoke to Croz again, in November 2022 for *Classic Rock*, he was insistent that he would continue sending his music out into the world for as long as he was able, for that was his calling, his purpose. "It's the one contribution I can make," he enthused. "The one place I can make anything better, is to make all the music that I possibly can."

David Crosby died, in the company of Jan and Django, of a "long illness". His embattled body is at rest, but the many, marvellous songs he gifted will live on. The Beach Boys' Brian Wilson tweeted to say he was "heartbroken" by Croz's passing, and scores of friends, contemporaries and celebrities were quick to follow in paying tribute.

A "deeply saddened" Stephen Stills eulogised Croz in a statement that, in touching on their often precarious relationship, revealed that they were "happy to be at peace" at the end. "He was without question a giant of a musician, and his harmonic sensibilities were nothing short of genius," Stills said. "[I] shall miss him beyond measure."

Similarly, Graham Nash was keen to focus on the positive aspects of their long-standing and testing friendship. "What has always mattered to David and me more than anything was the pure joy of the music we created together," he posted. "David was fearless in life and music… He spoke his mind, his heart, and his passion through his beautiful music and leaves an incredible legacy. These are the things that matter most."

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PLUS SPECIAL GUESTS
FRIDAY 7th JULY 2023
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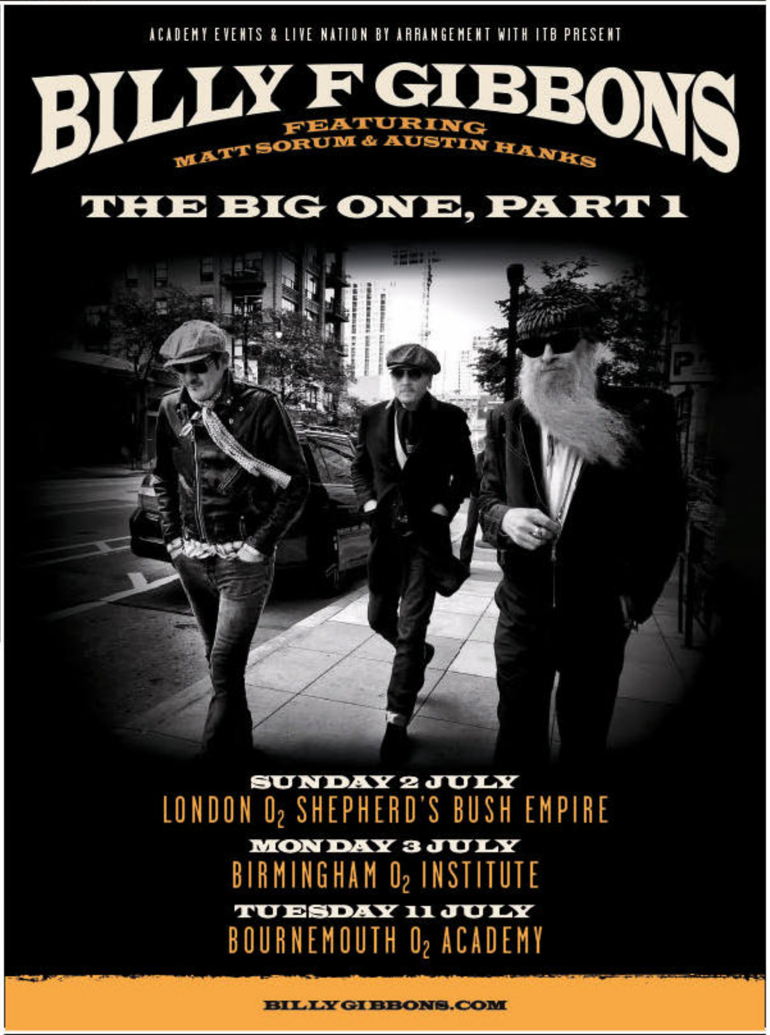
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FEATURING MATT SORUM & AUSTIN HANKS
THE BIG ONE, PART 1
SUNDAY 2 JULY
LONDON O_2 SHEPHERD'S BUSH EMPIRE
MONDAY 3 JULY
BIRMINGHAM O_2 INSTITUTE
TUESDAY 11 JULY
BOURNEMOUTH O_2 ACADEMY
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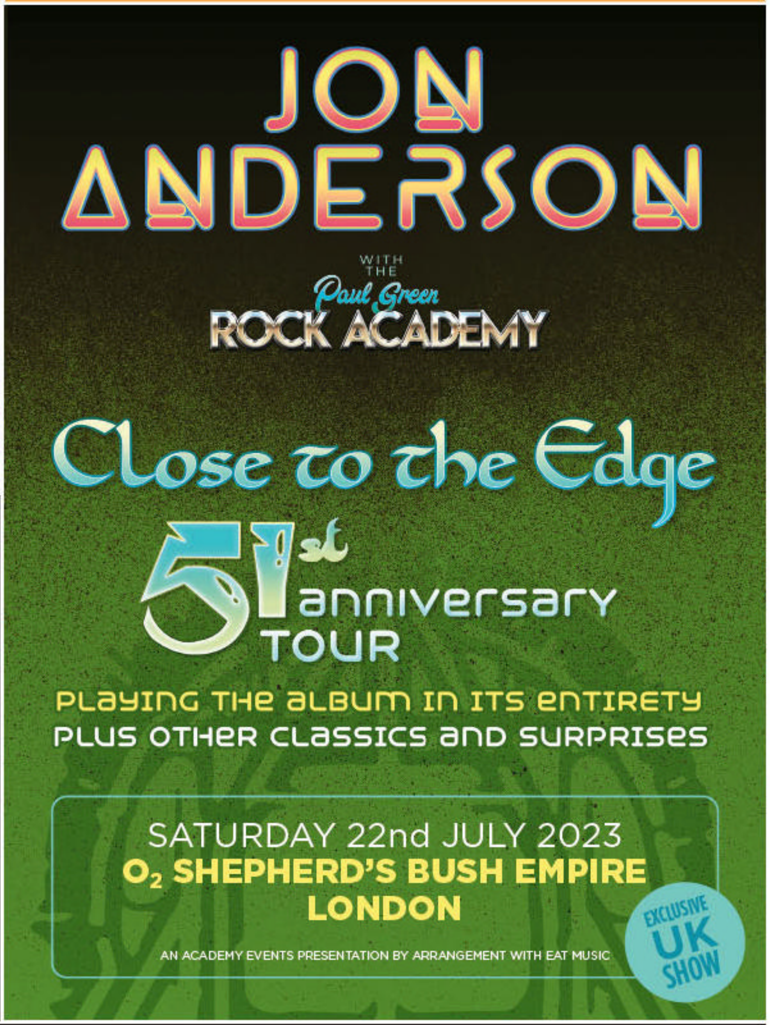
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F⚡⚡K ART LET'S DANCE

For **David Bowie** in 1983, art-rock and clown suits were in the past. He wanted to become a bona fide superstar. And he recruited the man nicknamned The Hitmaker to help him achieve that ambition.

Words: **Scott Rowley**

A new David Bowie was born on a beach near Hastings in the summer of 1980. Bowie was on location filming the video for *Ashes To Ashes*, the song that would become his second No.1 single, when something happened that, he said, profoundly changed him.

Director David Mallet was filming Bowie as he walked up the beach dressed in the pierrot outfit he wore on the cover of *Scary Monsters (And Super Creeps)*, when an old man and his dog walked into shot. The director and crew yelled at the guy, asking him to get out of the way. The man – who probably walked there every day – was unfazed: "Screw you," he said, "this is *my* beach".

So Bowie took a seat next to Mallet and waited for it to blow over. Eventually the old guy is walking past and Mallet says to him, "Do you know who this is?"

The old guy looked Bowie up and down. "Of course I do," he said. "It's some cunt in a clown suit."

Bowie thought it was hilarious ("That was a huge moment for me," he said later. "It put me back in my place and made me realise, yes, I'm just a cunt in a clown suit") but it had a wider impact. When he told the story years later, Bowie said the incident "profoundly changed" him. The "whole facade", he said, "came crumbling down".

Things were changing in the world of David Bowie. His relationship with manager Tony DeFries and Mainman finally ended in 1982 after a protracted split. *Scary Monsters* had been his last album for RCA, the label that had been his home since *Hunky Dory* in 1971. The label was milking his back catalogue with compilations – *Changes One, Changes Two, Rare*. For Bowie, a new multimillion-dollar deal with EMI offered a fresh start.

In an interview with *The Face* magazine before the release of *Let's Dance*, writer David Thomas suggested that EMI would be banking on *Let's Dance* repeating the success of the Rolling Stones' *Some Girls* album, a hugely successful record inspired by New York's disco scene.

"Absolutely," said Bowie. "The kind of enthusiasm they've shown is peculiar for me. I mean, I've never had that kind of thing shown to me for years!"

He talked about his older albums as sounding like historical artefacts. "I want something now that makes a statement in a more universal international field," he said.

> **"It was great in its way, but it put me in a real corner in that it f**ked with my integrity."**
>
> **David Bowie**

A year earlier he'd bumped into Nile Rodgers in New York. "To me," Rodgers wrote in his autobiography *Le Freak*, "Bowie was on the same level as Miles and Coltrane, James Brown and Prince, Paul Simon and Jimi Hendrix, Joni Mitchell and Nina Simone. In other words, he was a genuine, creative artist, doing what I called 'that real shit'."

The two men bonded over a love of jazz. Rodgers had been brought up in a bohemian household where he'd come home to find "Thelonious Monk, Nina Simone, Miles Davis hanging at our apartment". As a guitar player he had been infatuated by jazz legends like Wes Montgomery and Django Reinhardt, and later the guitarists of Motown, and funk players like Eddie Hazel, Jimmy Nolen, Willie 'Beaver' Hale. Like Bowie, he was a walking musical encyclopedia and loved it all: rock, pop, soul, R&B, blues, jazz.

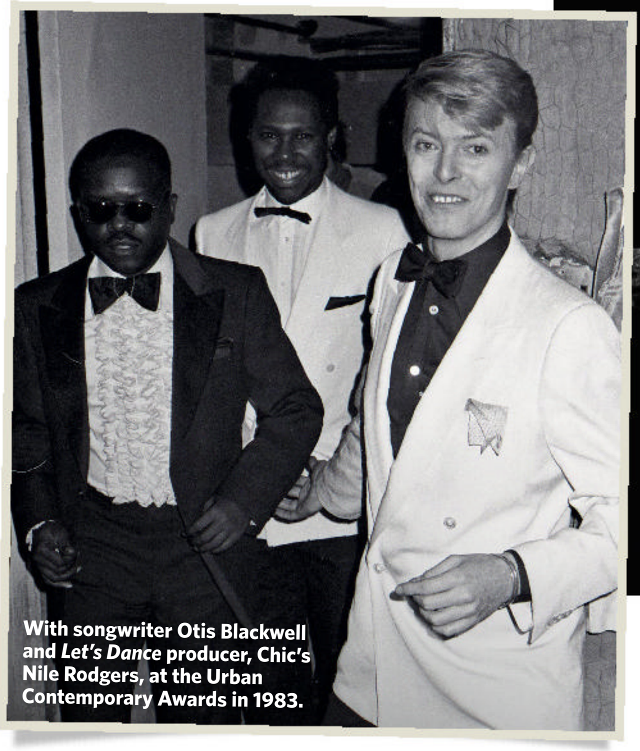
The meeting was a coincidence, but a lightbulb must have flickered in Bowie's head. Nile's band Chic – formed with bandmate and bass player Bernard Edwards – had become one of the most influential bands of the late 70s and early 80s. They had huge international hits – slick, funky, stylish tracks like *Good Times, Everybody Dance, Le Freak* – and, with their astonishing bass lines and mercurial guitar playing, had inspired everyone from Queen to the Sugarhill Gang, from The Clash to the Blockheads. Elegant and cool, with grooves that could raise the dead, Rodgers was fresh from producing and co-writing Diana Ross's biggest album, 1980's *Diana*. People were calling him The Hitmaker.

The pair set about making a record together, Rodgers excited at the prospect of pushing boundaries with a big star who was plainly unafraid of experimenting. They listened to records they might take inspiration from. Bowie told *The Face* that he listened to "much older stuff" before making *Let's Dance* because he wanted to avoid modern trends. He said he wanted "things that I wasn't going to pull apart… Things like the Alan Freed Rock'n'Roll Orchestra and Buddy Guy, Elmore James… Albert King, Stan Kenton."

"We searched around listening to all these different records," Rodgers told the *Rolling Stone* podcast, *Music Now*. "We were just looking at everything from Hapshash And The Coloured Coat, Mott The Hoople, Peanut Butter Conspiracy. Like ridiculous stuff, from the hippiest hippie stuff to The Ventures."

Eventually, Rodgers played Bowie some material for a solo album he was working on. He explained how he had been trying to innovate and experiment, how he believed artists had to push boundaries, when Bowie stopped him. "I want you to do what you do best," he said. "I want you to make hits." ▷

GREG GORMAN/CONTOUR BY GETTY IMAGES



With songwriter Otis Blackwell and *Let's Dance* producer, Chic's Nile Rodgers, at the Urban Contemporary Awards in 1983.

With *Let's Dance* bassist Carmine Rojas (left) and Serious Moonlight tour musical director and longtime guitarist/band leader Carlos Alomar.

The first song they worked on was *Let's Dance*. Bowie strummed it on an acoustic to Rodgers, who says it sounded like "Donovan meets Anthony Newley. And I don't mean that as a compliment."

"I felt that a lot of his songs were lacking in ear candy," he told *Rolling Stone*.

The song was so basic that Rodgers wondered if it was a test. "I just thought that he was [testing] me to see if I was a sycophant." He asked Bowie if he could try and arrange it differently. In video interviews since, Rodgers has demonstrated how he took the folk song, and made it first jazzy ("I knew that he liked jazz") before making it brighter and choppier – into the weird mutant funk track we know today.

"I explained to him that every song I've ever written starts with the chorus," says Rodgers. "He says: 'Really? That's crazy. You build to the chorus.' I said: 'Yeah – well, if you're white you build to the chorus.'"

Rodgers's theory was that radio stations gave black records less time to impress them, so you had to cut to the chase – don't bore us, get to the chorus. He won the argument: on the track, after the Isley Brothers/Beatles *Twist And Shout*-inspired build-up, the chorus and the title are the first words out of Bowie's mouth.

Bowie had another secret weapon up his sleeve. At the 1982 Montreux Jazz Festival he'd caught a performance by an up-and-coming blues guitarist called Stevie Ray Vaughan, whose Albert King-inspired playing was in sync with Bowie's listening at the time. "He completely floored me," Bowie said. "I probably hadn't been so gung-ho about a guitar player since seeing Jeff Beck with his [pre-Yardbirds] band The Tridents."

Was Stevie Ray a Bowie fan? "To tell you the truth, I wasn't very familiar with David's music when he asked me to play on the sessions," he said later. "David and I talked for hours and hours about our music, about funky Texas blues and its roots. I was amazed at how interested he was."

Nile Rodgers had been tasked with putting together the band for the album. Worried that his Chic bandmates – bassist Bernards Edwards and drummer Tony Thompson – were too deep into their drug use, he brought in Omar Hakim (at that point famous for Weather Report and Carly Simon) and bassist Carmine Rojas (then with Rod Stewart). Recording at New York's The Power Station, they nailed the title track in two takes.

"David said to me in no uncertain terms that he wanted me to make a hit album."
Nile Rodgers

In Rodgers's eyes, he'd been trusted to put the band together. "And then [Bowie] brings in this guy Stevie Ray Vaughan, who none of us had ever heard of."

The two guitar players soon became friends – Vaughan broke the ice by having barbecue from Texas flown in for all the musicians; Rodgers would later produce SRV's final album before his untimely death in 1990. Vaughan laid down fiery guitar parts on *Let's Dance*, reworkings of two older tracks: *China Girl* (co-written with Iggy Pop for Iggy's 1977 album *The Idiot*) and *Cat People* (co-written with and produced by Giorgio Moroder in 1981). His playing is the highlight of cover version *Criminal World*. It was a perfect collision of sounds, Vaughan bringing passion and grit to a project that could sometimes have seemed slick and clinical.

The finished album divided Bowie fans. At just eight songs long, tracks like *Ricochet, Shake It* and *Criminal World* seemed like filler. On *Without You* – backed by Bernard Edwards and Tony Thompson of Chic – they channel *Avalon*-era Roxy Music. The new version of *Cat People* was more muscular. The singles did all the heavy lifting. As well as the title track, there was Rodgers' reworking of *China Girl*, transformed from Iggy's muddy-dirge into a widescreen romance. *Modern Love* was a rock'n'soul pastiche with an infectious call-and-response structure.

All three singles featured large on MTV. The TV channel was changing the landscape of pop, and the video for *Let's Dance* unveiled the new Bowie. No longer "a cunt in a clown suit", he was tanned, with a blond quiff and dangerous white teeth, singing an accessible, danceable pop classic. The David Bowie of *Let's Dance* was a world away from the guy in the *Ashes To Ashes* video. Clean-cut, healthy, handsome, he was also unambiguously hetero: the video for *China Girl* featured him shagging on the beach, in a nod to the 1953 film *From Here To Eternity*.

To the disappointment of many, in an interview with *Rolling Stone* he disavowed his past in no uncertain terms: "The biggest mistake I ever made [was saying] that I was bisexual," he said. "Christ, I was so young then. I was experimenting."

A generation of gay fans had felt liberated by Bowie's claim to be bisexual a decade earlier. Now, it started to look like a PR stunt, or like he was moving back into the closet to appease middle America. In 2002 he admitted as much to *Blender* magazine: "America is a very puritanical place, and I think [being known as a bisexual] stood in the way of what I wanted to do," he said. "I had no inclination to hold any banners or to be a representative of any type of people."

It was there on the record itself. Album track *Criminal World* was a cover version of a song by British art-rockers Metro. Released as a single in 1977, it had been banned by the BBC for its 'sexual content': allusions to cross-dressing and gay sex. Bowie's cover made plain his nervousness about his image.

The original's lyrics *'I'm not the Queen so there's no need to bow/I think I see beneath your mink coat/I'll take*

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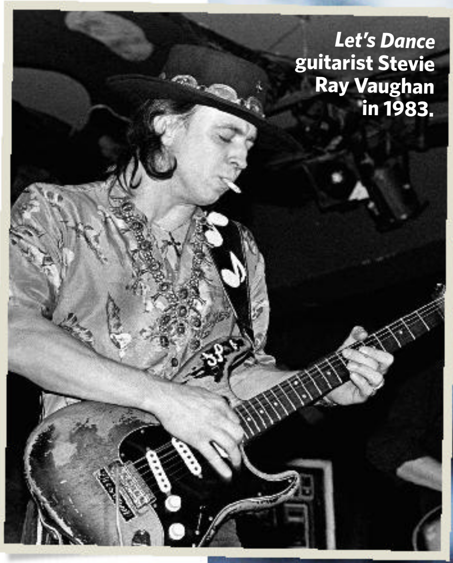
your dress and we can truck on out' are changed to *'I guess I recognise your destination, I think I see beneath your make-up/What you want is sort of separation'*, and Metro's later reference *'I saw you kneeling at my brother's door/That was no ordinary stick up'* was changed to *'You caught me kneeling at your sister's door.'* In the words of Bowie expert Chris O'Leary, he had "turned a gay-themed line into one that Vince Neil could've written".



***Let's Dance* guitarist Stevie Ray Vaughan in 1983.**

With all those sexual ambiguities out of the way, the door to the mainstream was kicked open. *Let's Dance* became Bowie's only single to go No.1 in the US and UK. The parent album went on to sell 11 million copies and turned Bowie into the international star he had wanted to be. By the end of 1983, it's estimated that he earned around $50 million.

Nile Rodgers didn't appear in the video for the title track or the follow-ups – *China Girl, Modern Love* – and Bowie didn't invite him to go on the road for his Serious Moonlight Tour. In fact, as Rodgers pointed out: "If you notice all the interviews that he did, very few of them talked about me."

Stevie Ray Vaughan had a similar experience. Originally, he explained later, he was just brought in for the album. "And then he asked me to do the tour, with [SRV's band] Double Trouble opening up. It stopped because Double Trouble was really never ever included on the shows. He just wanted me to play with him."

Bowie had form, of course. In 1970 he had been a struggling singer-songwriter with two novelty hits behind him – *The Laughing Gnome* and *Space Oddity* – watching with envy as his friend Marc Bolan reinvented himself as a glam-rock superstar. Mick Ronson and the Spiders From Mars reinvented Bowie musically and created some of rock's best-loved albums, only to be fired after an argument over money. Bowie was an amazing talent spotter, but he could be cold and callous when it came to the people who helped make him.

"I don't think that David had anything against me," Rodgers told *Music Now*. "I think that he had what I would call survivor's guilt. Like: you're so successful you might be defined by this one record when your body of work is so vast.

"Looking at it from my perspective: that record [*Let's Dance*], I made. Period. End of story. I mean, yes, David sang. Yes, he wrote songs, but basically, the way we made the album? Here's what we did: we had a brand new studio and it had a really nice lounge. He went into the lounge, I made the record. He would walk in after we cut the track, and he would listen and give a nod of approval. I never once had him say: 'Do that song again.' He never said that. If you look at all the years that have gone by, you've never heard any out-takes from *Let's Dance*."

"I wasn't very familiar with David's music when he asked me to play on the sessions."

Stevie Ray Vaughan

Moonlighting: Bowie on the opening night of his Serious Moonlight World Tour, Brussels, May 18, 1983.

Bowie had worked the same way previously on *Ziggy Stardust* and *Aladdin Sane*, giving sketches to the band on an acoustic guitar, leaving them to work them up into the rock songs we know and love. *The Jean Genie*, for example, "was knocked out in an hour on the second or third take," according to bassist Trevor Bolder.

"He didn't know one musician on that album," said Rodgers, "other than me and Stevie Ray Vaughan. He had never heard Omar Hakim, didn't know anybody."

Maybe some of the critical responses to the album stung Bowie a little. From being the arty outsider, he was now a global superstar. Critics sniped that he had sold out, as though Nile Rodgers had forced him into making some terrible disco album. Back then, the mostly white music press was sceptical about pop music and dance music, which meant a genuine talent like Nile Rodgers could struggle to be taken seriously. Pop geniuses could look like Brian Wilson or Phil Spector, but not Nile Rodgers.

In fact, *Let's Dance* helped break down divisions between black and white music. Famously, Bowie gave MTV a hard time for not showing enough black music on the channel. *Let's Dance* was at the vanguard of that, pioneering a post-punk dance music sound that defined the 80s.

As Bowie commented: "At the time, [*Let's Dance*] was not mainstream. It was virtually a new kind of hybrid, using blues-rock guitar against a dance format. There wasn't anything else that really quite sounded like that at the time. So it only seems commercial in hindsight because it sold so many.

"It was great in its way, but it put me in a real corner in that it fucked with my integrity!" he said. "It was a good record, but it was only meant as a one-off project. I had every intention of continuing to do some unusual material after that. But the success of that record really forced me, in a way, to continue the beast. It was my own doing, of course, but I felt, after a few years, that I had gotten stuck."

But it was his own doing. And it's revisionism to suggest that Bowie hadn't looked for hits in the past: *Space Oddity* was designed to cash-in on the Moon landing. From *Starman* to *Fashion* and *Ashes To Ashes*, Bowie wrote hits. He wasn't some avant-garde artist with no interest in the mainstream.

"David said to me in no uncertain terms that he wanted me to make a hit album," Rodgers said later. "Let's be very clear: a hit album. Meaning he wanted every song to be popping like a Chic record or Sister Sledge."

He got what he wanted and more. ●

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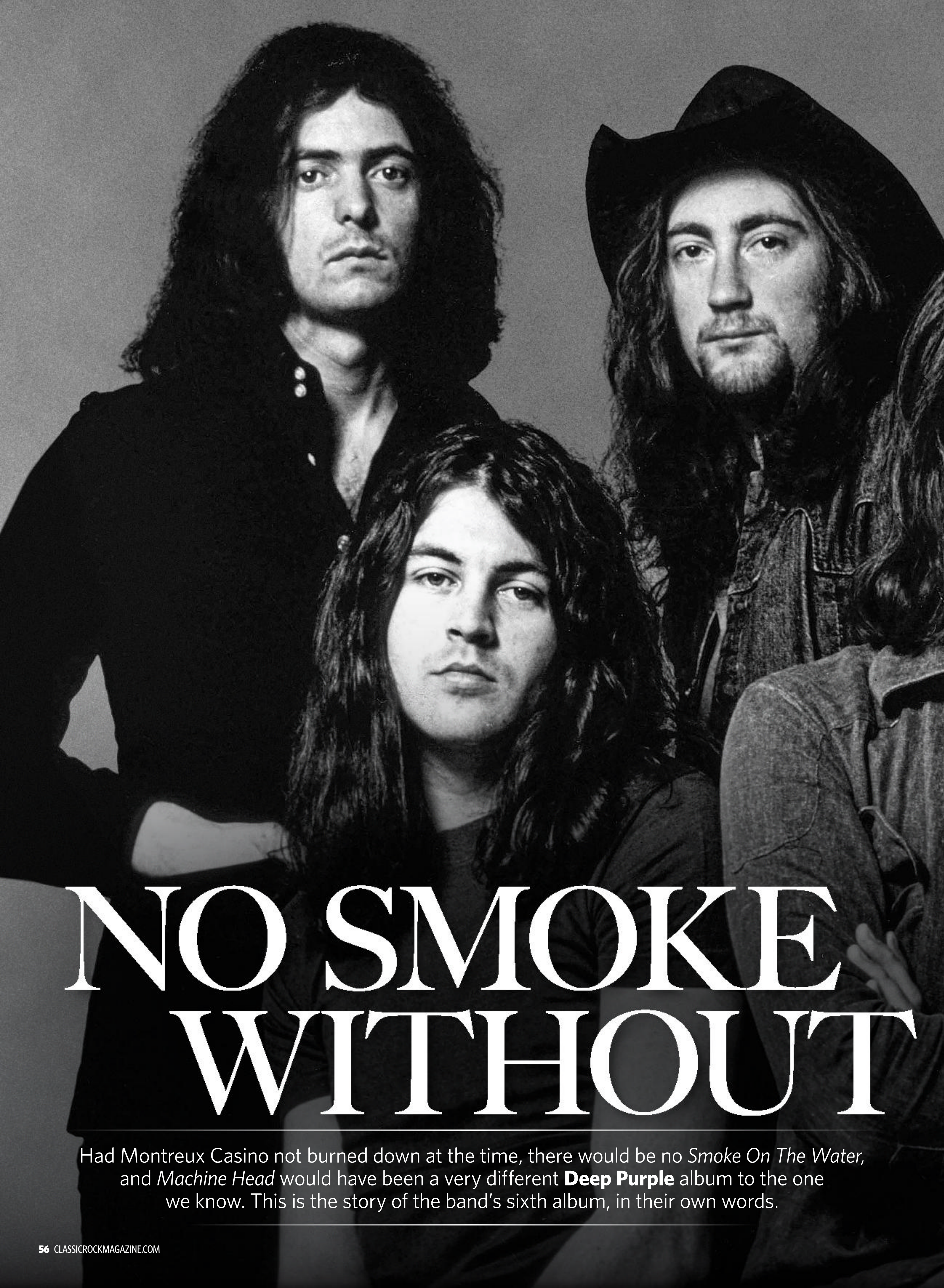
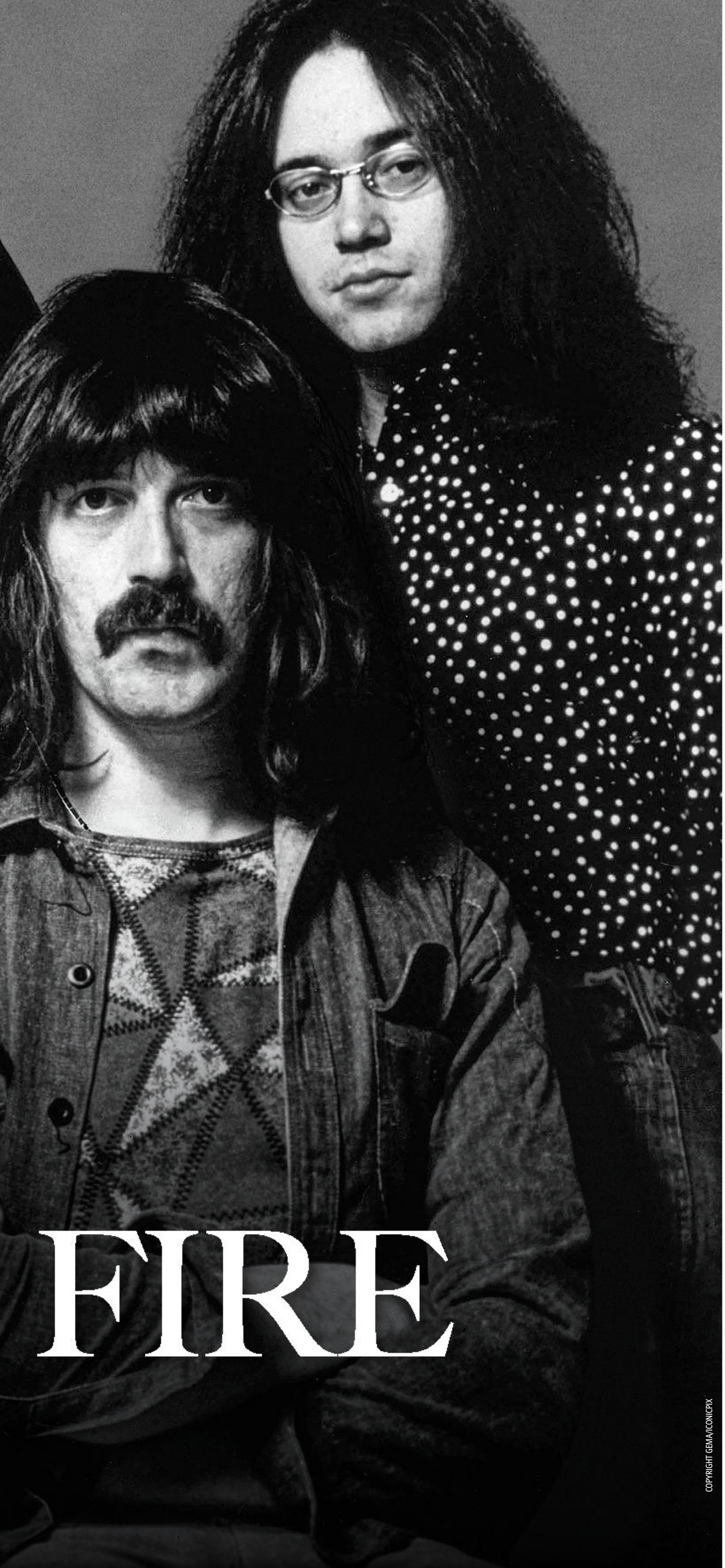


NO SMOKE WITHOUT

Had Montreux Casino not burned down at the time, there would be no *Smoke On The Water*, and *Machine Head* would have been a very different **Deep Purple** album to the one we know. This is the story of the band's sixth album, in their own words.



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DEEP PURPLE'S *FIREBALL* was the second album recorded with the Mark II line-up. It was another No.1 hit in the UK, but despite its success there was a nagging feeling within the band that the best was yet to come. As 1971 drew to a close, it was time for a change of scene…

Roger Glover (bassist): We needed to make another record, and we'd become pretty successful, and accountants and lawyers and management said: "You know, if you record outside of England you pay a different tax rate." And that's the reason we were in Switzerland. It could have been Germany or France, anywhere as long as it was out of England.

Jon Lord (keyboard player): We'd heard the Rolling Stones had a wonderful mobile studio, so we contacted them and we were able to get hold of that. And the reason we went to Montreux was because we were going to be in America at the end of 1971, but Ian Gillan got ill. It was hepatitis, I think – which was the disease to have at the time.

Ritchie Blackmore (guitarist): It was a very fashionable thing to have. Gillan went down with it first. And then we went back to America to do the shows we'd cancelled. And then I got hepatitis, and I ended up in a Harley Street hospital, and had about two months off. That gave me some time to write something. I came up with *Space Truckin'*, *Smoke On The Water* and stuff like that.

Ian Gillan (vocalist): *Fireball* gave us a chance to actually bring out what I always call the funk in the band, instead of just pure English rock. However, when we got to doing *Machine Head*, there was a lot of pressure to do what most people saw as a follow-up to *In Rock*. We'd got to get back to doing that rock stuff, and that was pretty much how we approached it.

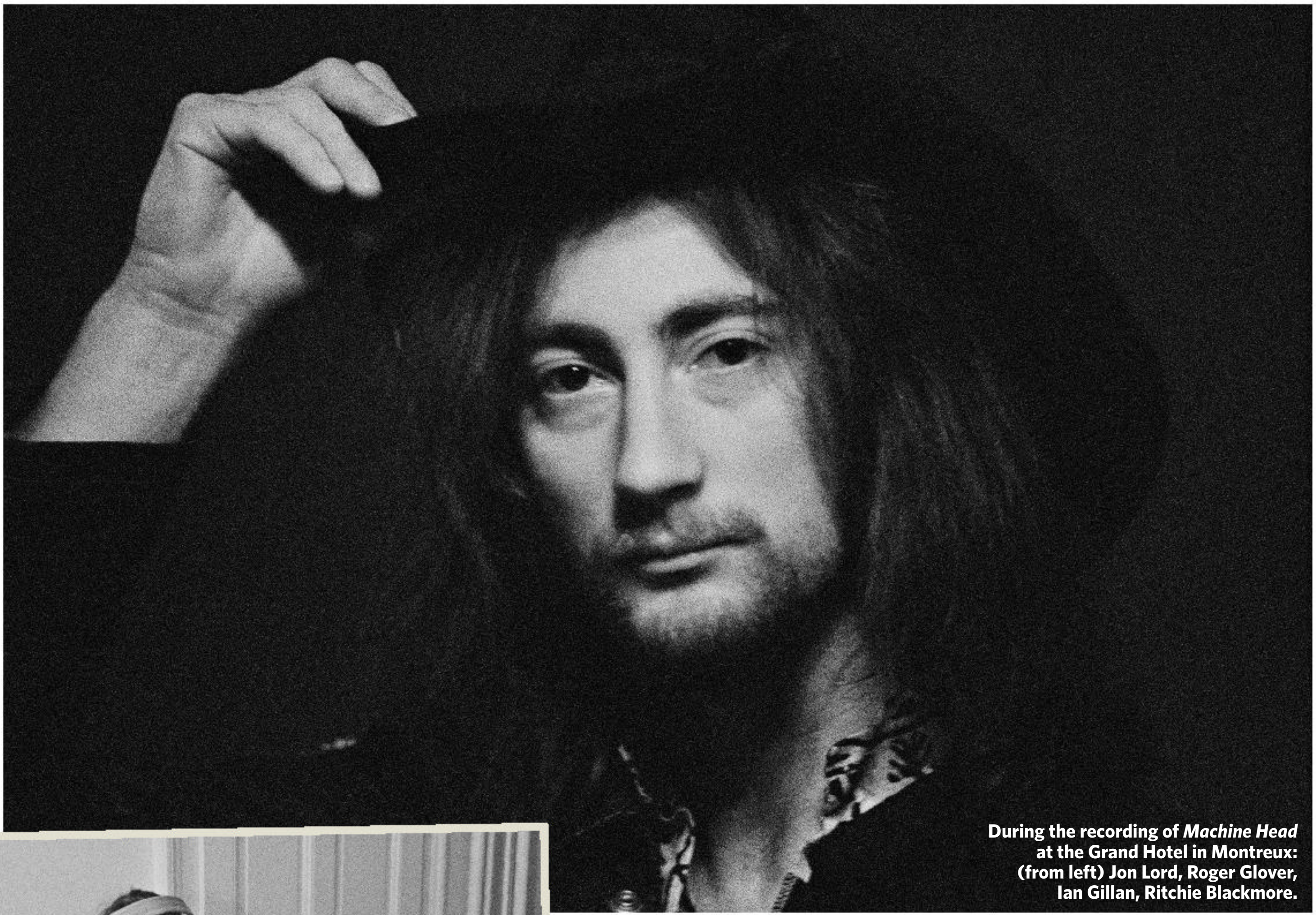
Lord: A dear friend of ours, called Claude Nobs, who ran the Montreux Jazz Festival, said: "Why don't you come to Montreux?"

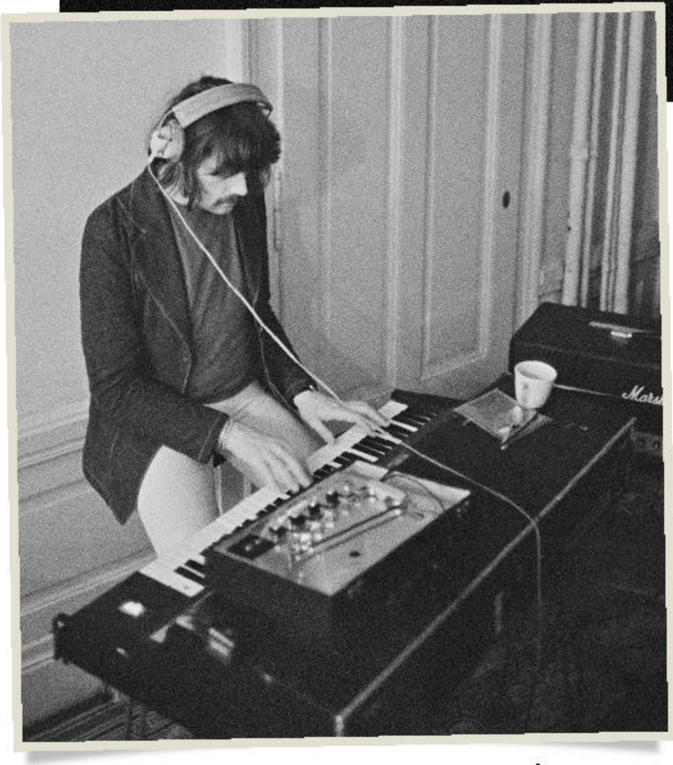
Colin Hart (Deep Purple tour manager): *Machine Head* was supposed to be recorded at the Montreux Casino, and we were supposed to be starting after Frank Zappa played a gig at the casino. They [Purple] were going to record where the casino concerts were held.

Ian Paice (drummer): We went down to Switzerland, and everything went from being under control and knowing what we were going to do to, literally, going up in flames.

Hart: The Stones' mobile was parked next to the casino. The Frank Zappa show was the night before and we'd all been invited. It happened just like it did in the song [*Smoke On The Water*]. Some idiot fired a flare gun into the suspended ceiling and it just erupted into flames.

Claude Nobs (Montreux Festival organiser): The ceiling was made from some very flammable things, that you could not do any more these days. And the air-conditioning system started to get crazy because there was more and more heat coming in. ▷





During the recording of *Machine Head* at the Grand Hotel in Montreux: (from left) Jon Lord, Roger Glover, Ian Gillan, Ritchie Blackmore.

Blackmore: Frank Zappa was very nonplussed. He stopped playing and said: "It appears the roof is on fire, and we have to vacate the premises and we'll do it in an orderly fashion…" And at that point he threw down his guitar and jumped out of the window.

Paice: Within minutes it was an inferno, flames hundreds of feet in the air. Back at the hotel, Roger and Ian saw this pall of smoke drifting across Lake Geneva.

Hart: We all ended up standing on the edge of the lake, watching the place go up in flames. Our concern was for the mobile studio that was gently roasting. Someone tried to get it out, but the water from the fire department's hoses meant it was bogged down. It was getting hosed down with water on one side, while the other side was blistering. We thought it was all over. But Claude Nobs took it all so matter-of-factly: "Don't worry, we'll find somewhere else."

Nobs: We first went to The Pavilion [theatre and ballroom], and I said to the guys: "We can record only until ten o'clock in the evening, due to the noise carrying across the mountains. We'll finish it then and go out for dinner at ten p.m." Of course, the first night they finished at four in the morning.

Paice: The first track we laid down – and the last to be finished – was *Smoke On The Water*, before we knew what it was going to be called. There was no sound-proofing and we were recording at night. A hell of a racket!

Blackmore: We did *Smoke On The Water* there, and the riff I made up in the spur of the moment. I just threw it together with Ian Paice. Roger Glover joined in. We went outside to the mobile unit and were listening back to one of the takes, and there was some hammering on the door. It was the local police, and they were trying to stop the whole thing because it was so loud. We knew that they were coming to close everything down. We said to Martin Birch, our engineer: "Let's see if we have a take." So they were outside hammering and taking out their guns… It was getting pretty hostile.

Martin Birch (engineer): It was about two in the morning, the neighbours were complaining. We locked all the doors. I mean, literally, it was 'da-da-da! Bang, bang', "polizei, polizei" "Piss off!" 'Da-da-da'. So we had to get the track down before the police broke in and chucked us out.

Glover: About a day or two after the fire, I'd woken up in my room, and before I'd even opened by eyes I said some words out loud. It was almost like an echo in the room: "Did I just say something out loud?" I must have. And what

SHEPARD SHERBELL/GETTY x2

"[Purple] had this finesse and it had this animal. And to me, that's what sums up Deep Purple."

Roger Glover

SHEPARD SHERBELL/GETTY x2

did I say? "Smoke on the water." I went down to breakfast and I said to Ian: "Oh a title came to me today: *Smoke On The Water*." There's a great photograph, it's taken over Ian's shoulder, and he's got a notebook and the first two verses of *Smoke On The Water* are written, and the third one is yet to be written, and I'm opposite him. And that's actually how we wrote it.

Paice: The recording was so quick. I really don't remember it. Music was written before, but not the vocals – there's no way *Smoke* could have been written unless the casino fire had happened.

Gillan: I can't remember the solo being recorded, but it's very good – full of character and technique, normal for Ritchie.

Nobs: By now I'd had to find them another place. I found the Grand Hotel. So we took a gangway in the middle of the hotel, and put some absorbing material in there – about a hundred mattresses – to get the sound right.

Gillan: We had to make it up as we went along. I remember equipment being set up all over the place to get some separation without us turning down. It was surreal when I think back, but normal at the time. You did what you had to do. The truck was too far away and it was bloody cold, so no one was keen to listen to anything until we felt it was right.

Lord: The Grand Hotel was this forbidding place, this huge great thing – cold, damp, with great ceilings and echoing corridors. I wouldn't have wanted to stay there in a million years. But we could get it for about thruppence a week.

"*Smoke* only made it on to the album as a filler track because we were short of time."

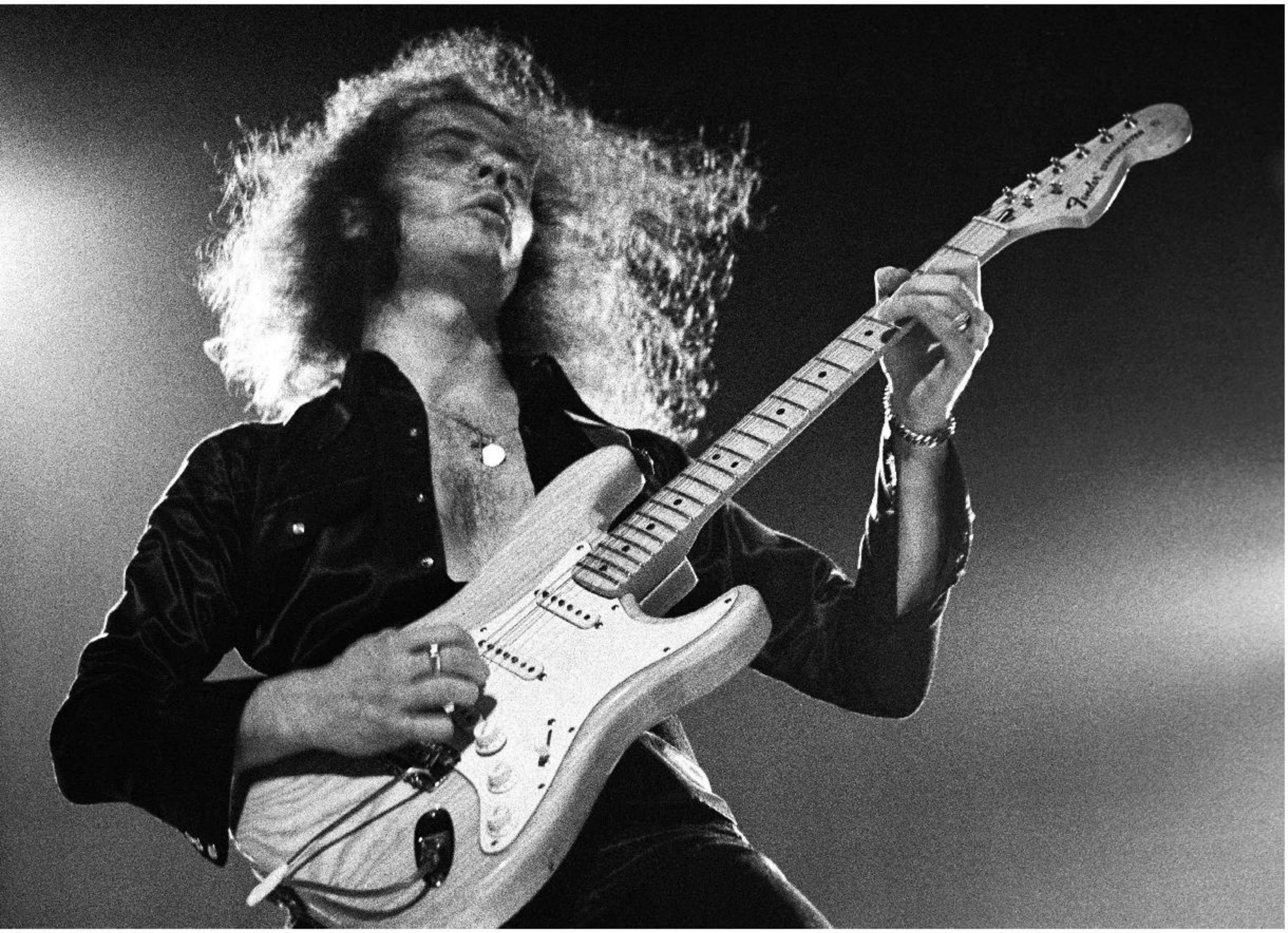
Ian Gillan

Blackmore: It was the depths of winter, and we would set up in the corridor of the hotel, Ian Paice in a little alcove with his drums. But every time we wanted to listen to a playback, we would have to leave the corridor and go through two doors into a bedroom, across the bedroom, through another two doors into a bathroom and on to a balcony, run down the balcony, through the French windows into another bedroom, across the bedroom through another two doors on to the landing, and then down a winding staircase to reception and across reception to the front door, and across the courtyard, and then we would get to the mobile. By which time we weren't too interested in hearing a playback anyway. It was absolutely freezing and the fingers were going numb. Interesting how a couple of days in, it was: "Do you want to hear that one back?" "No, it's okay, Martin."

Birch: I think in the end they knew when it was good. And they would ask me, cos I had a talk-back into the studio with them. Once they got a song clear in their heads, that was it, we'd start laying it down. And the majority of the time it was one, two, three takes, something like that. We didn't do any overdubs on the backing tracks. Everything was done live.

Lord: Old mattresses, blankets, we stuffed everything down this corridor and made it as dead a recording environment as possible so that Martin could record it absolutely flat. And if you listen to *Machine Head* with that in mind, you'll hear it's a very dark album. After Ritchie left in 1993, Joe Satriani filled in for us for six months. And he said: "I tell you what, man, that's the darkest rock album."

Glover: *Highway Star* is the opening track on the album. Ritchie is the driving force behind this. He plays with such precision – that driving, machine-gun effect. I came up with the title and a couple of lines. Most of ▷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"Most of my solos were very spontaneous, except for *Highway Star*. Probably the one time I ever worked out a solo."

Ritchie Blackmore

the song is Gillan's, and everyone joined in on the arrangement. The thing that really impressed me when I first heard it again after so many years was Paicey is swinging – and we're all playing straight. And that's the essence of rock'n'roll.

Blackmore: Most of my solos were very spontaneous, except for *Highway Star*. Probably the one time I ever worked out a solo. I've heard other guitar players talk about that solo, but it's an average guitar solo. It just has identity, and maybe that's what people relate to.

Glover: On *Maybe I'm A Leo*, it wasn't a conscious thought, but I'd just heard *How Do You Sleep?* by John Lennon, and what I really liked about it was that the riff came in not on the down beat. And I thought I want to write a riff that instead of going 'two, three, four, riff', went 'two, three, four, badam, badam, bom!'

Blackmore: I really like *Pictures Of Home*, because it is very melodic. There were some members of the band that didn't like that one at all.

Gillan: I remember writing *Pictures Of Home* with Ritchie at his house near the airport, near Heathrow. I went round there and his wife Babs was standing there looking Rubenesque, and their dog was doing back somersaults. And we walked upstairs to where he had his guitars. And he had this riff which was based on [Chris Farlowe's cover of the Rolling Stones'] *Out Of Time*.

Blackmore: I heard the riff for that on a short-wave radio, and it was probably coming from Bulgaria or Turkey, or somewhere like that. One of these days, these Bulgarian/Turkish people are going to come out the woodwork, saying: "I wrote that."

Gillan: He told me that it was from a song called *Out Of Time*. But of course he does get Bulgarian radio signals coming through his head quite a lot, so that would explain that other part.

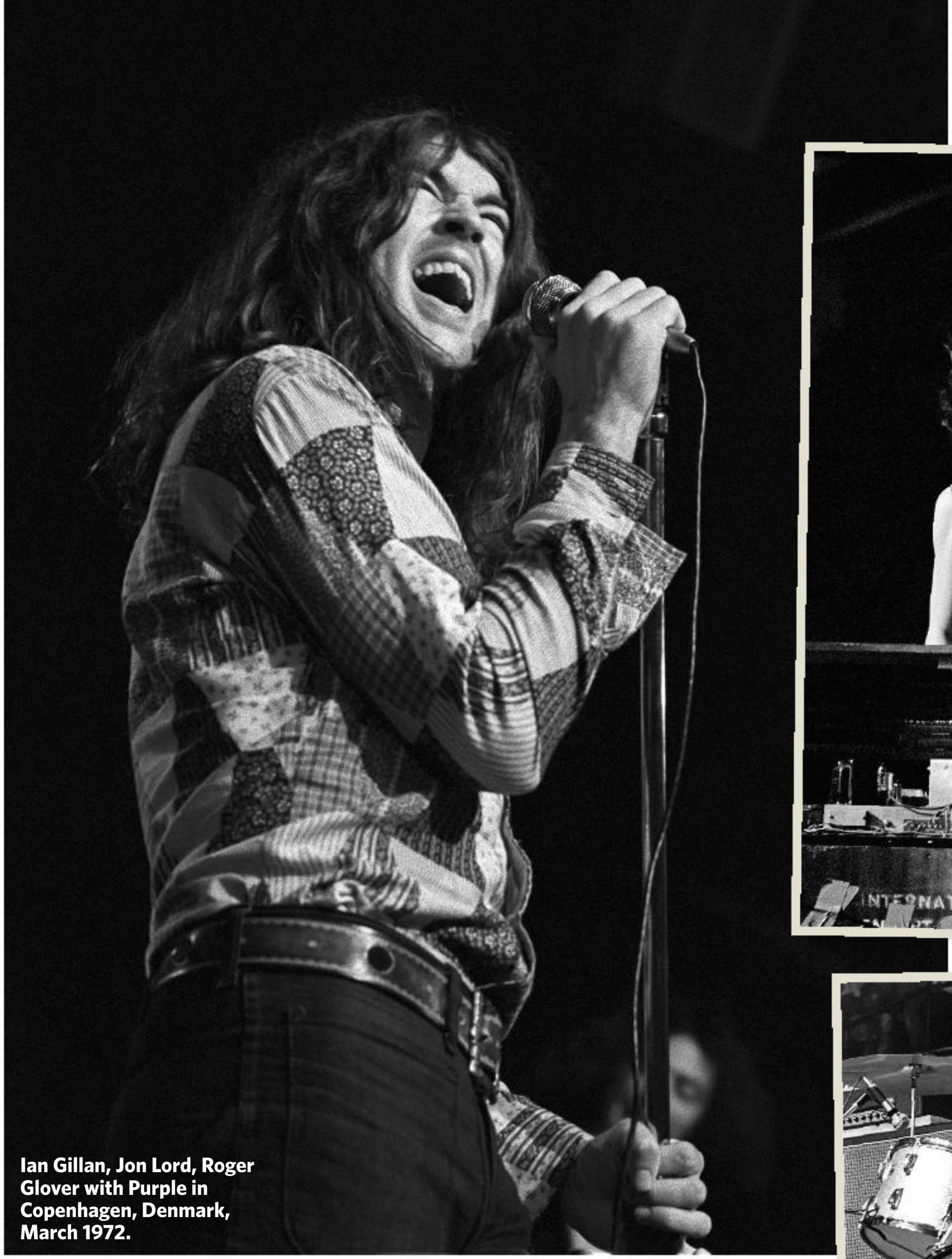
Blackmore: I remember the rest of the band were a little worried about Ian singing about eagles and snow. I never listen to lyrics anyway, unless it's Bob Dylan singing. So I said: "Well, eagles and snow. Sounds good enough to me, carry on."

Glover: We invested an enormous amount of time and trouble into *Never Before,* because we thought it was going to be a single; it was a bit more commercial.

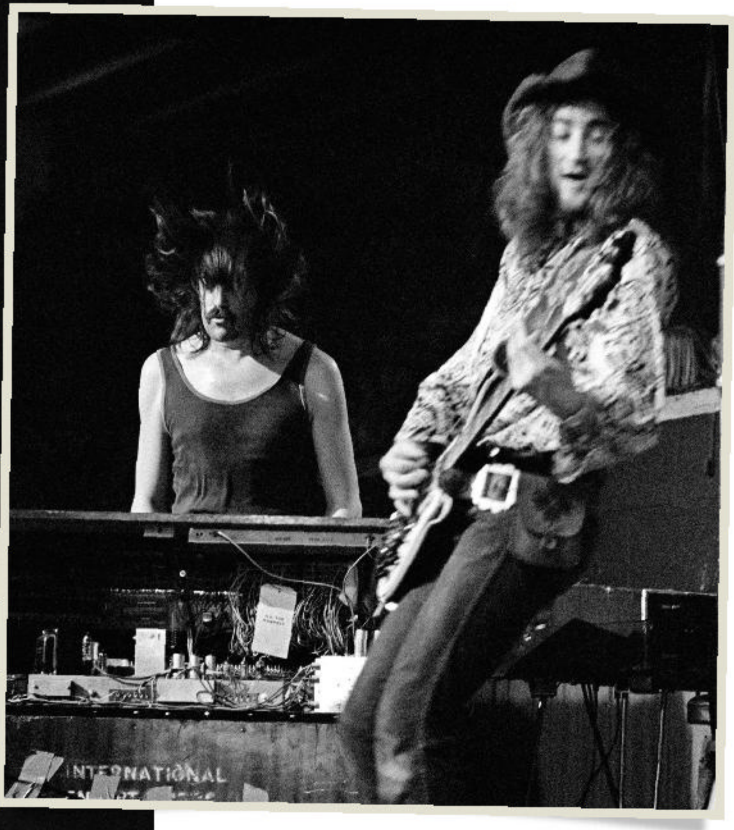
Paice: We thought we should have one track which was radio-friendly. But you can't get them all right.

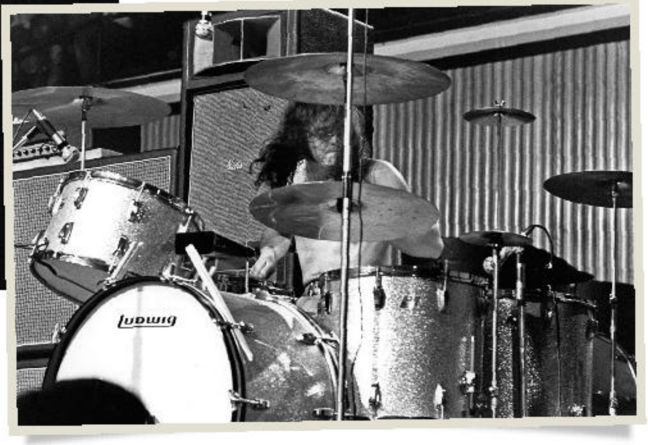
Lord: I think *Never Before* is one of the least popular tracks on *Machine Head*. But try and imagine *Never Before* with [Free/Bad Company vocalist] Paul Rodgers wailing away on the blue notes, and I think you'll arrive at what Ritchie was expecting to hear. What Ian Gillan did was this strange hybrid between a slight pop tune and a very hard delivery, which was what Gillan was astonishingly good at coming up with.

Gillan: I vowed I'd never talk again about that song. It was done for the wrong reasons.



Ian Gillan, Jon Lord, Roger Glover with Purple in Copenhagen, Denmark, March 1972.





Blackmore: I think we were more excited about *Never Before* than anything on the record. It's got this great, memorable little hook. And it failed miserably.

Paice: The crime to me was that the ballad, *When A Blind Man Cries* wasn't on the album [it was the B-side of the single *Never Before*]. It was from the same sessions, it had the same lyricism to it, but Ritchie – he no like it! It would have been a massive song now, had it been on that record.

Lord: The difficulty with that song, but what in fact made it a great track, was using the straight sound on the Hammond, and it pushed me into a way of playing that song which in later years, when we played it live, I never recreated. I never got back to being able to play it that way. I'd given myself a restraint, on purpose, and it shows up strongly on *When A Blind Man Cries*.

Gillan: *Lazy* was an instrumental to start with. Then they let me in. So it worked very well, cos the verses were just a blues shuffle. There was this huge, long intro to the song, and you never thought that there was gonna be any words coming to it, but eventually it got there.

Paice: *Lazy* is one of those that was better a year down the road recorded live, when we got to know it. Sometimes in the studio you just don't know the piece well enough.

Blackmore: With *Space Truckin'*, I remember in the early sixties there was a TV series called *Batman*. And I had this riff that was similar to the theme tune, and I saw how simple that was. I came up with this riff and took it to Ian Gillan and said: "I have this idea and it's so simple and so silly." I went over into the corner and played it to him very quietly – I was very shy – and he grasped it immediately, and said: "I think we can use it." And that turned into *Space Truckin'*.

Paice: My favourite track rhythmically on *Machine Head* is *Space Truckin'*, because of its solidity and simplicity – it's about the only time Ritchie played block Chuck Berry chords, four to the bar.

"We thought we should have one track which was radio-friendly. But you can't get them all right."

Ian Paice on *Never Before*

Gillan: I recollect the *Batman* connection. I remember we used to do *Batman* in [Gillan and Glover's pre-Deep Purple band] Episode Six, and so Roger would do it all the time, and I think Ritchie sort of improvised around that thing and came up with the beginning of it. But also there was this thing, *Keep On Truckin'* [a Robert Crumb comic strip from the 60s].

Paice: So the trucking thing was sort of very in vogue then. It was like, you know, grooving along the street – keep on trucking.

Gillan: We thought it was so modern to be living in the space age. So the idea of being a space trucker, as opposed to a road trucker, was interesting. So you could bring in all these wordsmith tricks and puns and stuff like: *'They've rocked around the Milky Way… They got music in their solar system… We had a lot of luck on Venus… We always had a ball on Mars…'*

Lord: We'd walked away from *Smoke On The Water* going: "This is a cool track but I don't quite know what we can do with it." ▷

MAIN: JAN PERSSON/GETTY; GETTY x2

Machine makers: (l-r) Ritchie Blackmore, Ian Paice, Jon Lord, Roger Glover, Ian Gillan.

"The most important thing *Machine Head* did was to introduce Deep Purple to the USA, because *In Rock* didn't come out there."

Ian Paice

Gillan: It was just another riff, like *Into The Fire*. We didn't make a big deal out of it, and it wasn't being considered as a track for the album. It was a jam at the first sound-check. We didn't work on the arrangement – it was a jam. *Smoke*… only made it onto the album as a filler track because we were short of time. On vinyl, thirty-eight minutes – nineteen minutes per side – was the optimum time if you wanted good quality, and we were about seven minutes short with one day to go. So we dug out the jam and put vocals to it.

Nobs: One night, they rang, and came with a Philips cassette and said: "We just had a friend do a little thing for you which will not be on the album." They put the cassette on my player, and it was *Smoke On The Water*. And I said: "What? It's incredible!" And they said: "You think so? We should put it on the album?" I said: "It *has* to be on the album!"

Lord: I think it was Joe Smith at Warner Brothers in America who recognised *Smoke On The Water* as a potential single. We all thought *Never Before* was the obvious single. It shows how much bands know about commercial consideration. He said: "That's the single." And we said: "Are you out of your mind?" He said: "No, that's the one."

Glover: With *Machine Head* none of us predicted [the success of] *Smoke On The Water*. That was the last thing on our minds that that would become an iconic song. You never can tell, it's down to the people.

Paice: There is no logic to it. You create everything with the same intention of making it as good as you can make it, and every now and again the public goes: "I really like that one", and you just say: "Thank you!"

Blackmore: We made *Machine Head* in three weeks and three days, I think. It was very productive, very constructive, and it had some really good songs. It captured what we were about at the time. *Machine Head* came out, and it was a reasonable hit. But it wasn't until *Made In Japan* [live album, released in December 1972], when we did those songs on stage, that people actually absorbed it and registered that it was a good record. I was surprised, because I preferred the recorded versions.

Paice: The most important thing *Machine Head* did was to introduce Deep Purple to the USA, because *In Rock* didn't come out there.

Glover: Deep Purple to me was two elements: the superb musicianship of Ritchie, Jon and Ian Paice, and the sort of naive, homemade, simple quality of the songwriting that Ian Gillan and I brought to the band. If you get a band of superb musicians, it's very rarely successful commercially. If you've got a band of simple musicians, it can be successful. But what Purple had was both in equal measure. It had this finesse and it had this animal. And to me, that's what sums up Deep Purple.

DP and Martin Birch interview material taken from the transcripts for Classic Albums: Deep Purple – The Making Of Machine Head (Eagle Rock DVD, 2002). Additional interviews: Mark Blake, Drew Thompson, Henry Yates, Matt Frost, James Hanley.

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The Hot List

THE ESSENTIAL NEW ROCK TRACKS YOU NEED TO HEAR THIS MONTH AND THE BANDS TO HAVE ON YOUR RADAR

THE COLD STARES: ALEX MORGAN/PRESS

We're back with our second Hot List of 2023! And what a list it is, showing once again that rock and its many tributaries are in excellent health, with the promise of more good things to come. In this month's selection of hot-hot-hotness we've got brilliant blues, lush heartland, heavy disco grooves, southern rock, hard rock, original sounds, super-retro vibes and a lot that falls somewhere in between… We're barely into spring and music-wise the year's already looking pretty great. Plus almost all the artists covered over the next few pages have UK gigs in their diaries, so if you like what you find then keep your eyes peeled for dates near you.

Check out more of the best new rock releases (and vote for your favourite in our Tracks Of The Week) at loudersound.com/classic-rock

The Cold Stares

The Joy

A refreshingly cinematic take on the old slow blues jam, *The Joy* wraps its uplifting message in cool, dark edges and grungy undertones. You can hear the influence of Hendrix and Son House on frontman Chris Tapp's playing and singing, and from there the chorus unfurls in a way that makes us picture a long drive across present-day America, taking in views both changed and totally unchanged. It's from their excellent new album *Voices* (their first as a trio), which comes out this month.

thecoldstares.com

Arielle '73

There are young 'old souls', and then there's Arielle. A bone-deep analogue junkie with her own signature Brian May guitar, she's just released a driving, slide-heavy new single (the title track of her next album), which is also a love letter to her orange 1973 Volkswagen bay window bus – straight from the *Almost Famous* parking lot (or that's certainly how it looks). The music itself is a pocket-sized Aladdin's cave of 60s and early-70s colour: all Stevie Nicks charisma and Allmans sunshine. *'I was born with different roots,'* she sings. No kidding.
imarielle.com

The Lemon Twigs
Corner Of My Eye

The New York brother duo's first new single in over two years, *Corner Of My Eye* is so beautifully soft, sweet and 60s/70s-esque you won't believe they're still in their twenties. Like grown-up candy floss for the soul, all dulcet haze and effortlessly sophisticated melody – billed as "a warm, guitar-led ode to a new love interest". Imagine a heartbroken Brian Wilson crooning Bee Gees ballads on a sunny afternoon and you're in the right head-space.
thelemontwigs.com

Robert Jon & The Wreck
Pain No More

These rising Californian rootsers teamed up with Blackberry Smoke frontman Charlie Starr for this searing flourish of southern grit and honey. Its riffs are juicily on the money, but it's the organ-framed melody that won our hearts as soon as it kicked in – one of those warm, highly moreish tunes that tells you you're in good hands. It's even got a Starr-esque *'mmm-yeah!'* The audio equivalent of buttery mashed potatoes with a dash of hot sauce.
robertjonandthewreck.com

ARIELLE: ANDREW McMEEKIN/PRESS; THE LEMON TWIGS: EVA CHAMBERS/PRESS; ROBERT JON & THE WRECK: ROBBY BOYD/PRESS

Rival Sons
Rapture

Rising and falling in tough and tender waves, with Jay Buchanan deploying the boldest heights of his voice in just the right places, this new taste of Rival Sons' next album, *Darkfighter* (the first of two full-length records due for release this year, in addition to touring), finds them in a heady, intriguing place. You could liken it to The Doors doing a session with Jack White – somewhere dusty out in Joshua Tree – but as ever with these guys the truth lies somewhere in the cracks between. Between moments that say 'huge rock song' and 'strange dreamscape'. It's good to have them back.
rivalsons.com

HARDY
The Mockingbird & The Crow

Teamed with a beautifully characterful stop-motion video, the Mississippi country maverick's new song is a breath of fresh air in a scene so long dominated by slick, 'bro-country' stars. It's both a loving tribute to his Deep South roots and a sharp satire of the way those roots are so often packaged by the industry. From dulcet, decidedly yee-haw beginnings, *The Mockingbird & The Crow* shifts through dark, Nirvana-esque chords into a monster of a hard-rock second half, Hardy declaring: *'I'm a mockingbird, singing songs that sound like other songs you've heard.'* His album of the same name (and country-to-rock split) is out now.
hardyofficial.com

RIVAL SONS: PAMELA LITTKY/PRESS; HARDY: MICHAEL JONES/PRESS

CROWNLANDS: ANDY FORD/PRESS

Crown Lands

Starlifter: Fearless Pt II

Whatever you do, do *not* be put off by the length of this track, if descriptors like 'long song', 'prog epic' or 'a lot like Rush and Genesis' typically have you running to your AC/DC collection. If you think all that stuff isn't your jam, then this Canadian duo's new single might convert you (and if it *is* your jam…well, you can thank us later).

Starlifter: Fearless Pt II is that rarest of things, an 18-minute prog-rock epic that flies by in a heartbeat. A highly eventful, multi-dimensional heartbeat, but you get the idea. Virtuosic twiddles and otherworldly themes are tempered by lush, classic riffs, built on a melodic narrative that ebbs, flows and absorbs the listener with ease. It's classy, clever stuff that wants to please, not baffle.

crownlandsmusic.com

FANTASTIC NEGRITO: TRAVIS SHINN/PRESS

Fantastic Negrito

Oh Betty

Last year Xavier Dphrepaulezz (aka Oakland's bluesed up funkateer Fantastic Negrito) released the excellent *White Jesus Black Problems* album, which leaned into the eclectic textures of his musical arsenal (mixing bluesy moods with country, soul, psychedelia, Red Hot Chilis-esque funk…) as well as his own ancestry. Now we have its acoustic alternative, *Grandfather Courage*, from which this haunting rebirth of *Oh Betty* is taken. In such stripped-back, finger-picked form, it reacquires some of the Delta atmosphere that prevailed more strongly on his previous albums. You could imagine this being jammed on a porch in the Deep South, honky-tonk piano in one corner, while the sun sets in beautiful, menacing shades.

fantasticnegrito.com

Märvel
Catch 22

Rocking and raging like the leather-trousered love child of The Hellacopters and Thin Lizzy, this newly released deep cut from the Märvel vaults (part of a new compilation) is rock'n'roll for boozing and poring over your old gig tickets and seven-inchers, pausing every so often to declare that they don't make 'em like this any more. Except of course they do – or at least these guys do. "Sometimes, no matter how hard you try, you end up with your beard in the mailbox or pants down to your ankles and a school bus full of idiots laughing at you," the band say of the song's inspiration (well… don't we all?). "You just can't win. And even more sometimes, you're in a relationship where you can't stand each other but still can't exist without each other."
marvel.nu

The Heavy *Hurricane Coming*

Inspired by frontman Kelvin Swaby being caught up, quite literally, in a hurricane (Hurricane Irma) shortly after moving to the US from the UK, this is a bracing, funky jam spiked with raw blues urgency; all garage-y fuzz, 60s R&B and soulful horns. It makes a commanding, sit-up-and-listen introduction to the trans-Atlantic rockers' sixth album *Amen*. "It's just the way that relationships are as well," Swaby says. "It was like: 'Just be careful of taking something beautiful for granted.' Don't take people for fools. There's always something waiting, lurking, even…"
theheavy.co.uk

City And Colour *Underground*

City And Colour, aka singer-songwriter Dallas Green, finds a lush, brooding new groove on this beautiful taste of his next album, *The Love Still Held Me Near*; think gauzy guitars and big heartland sensibilities. Born out of tragic circumstances, including the death of his best friend in 2019, the album promises stirring, soul-searching catharsis. "It's about digging deep down into yourself and attempting to unearth hope and light in the things that can comfort you through those times," Green says. "For me that has always been writing and recording music, so that's exactly what I did."
cityandcolour.com

MARVEL: ANNETT REIMER MANHEM/PRESS; CITY AND COLOUR: VANESSA HEINS/PRESS

Marisa & The Moths *Pedestal*

With moody riffs, a brilliant guitar solo and vocals that fold in notes of Maria Brink and Amy Lee, Marisa & The Moths' new single *Pedestal* is sombre stuff that rocks. "This song is for anyone that has ever felt disregarded, disrespected or objectified in their life in some way," Marisa says. "As a woman, every day I encounter some form of discrimination, especially in my line of work… and I know so many other women have experienced the same, which is what inspired me to write this song."
marisaandthemoths.com

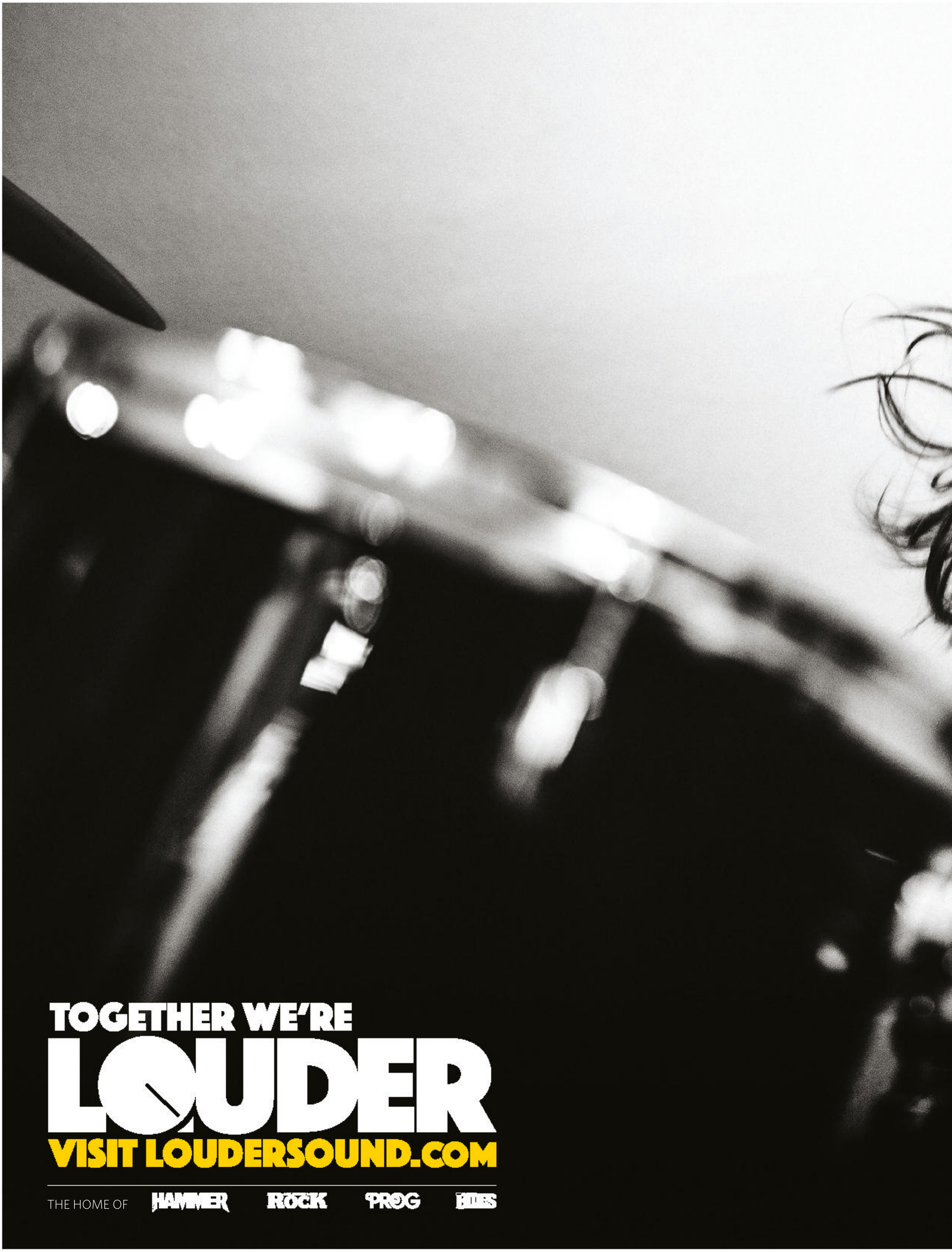
Demob Happy *Voodoo Science*

A few artists have done sexy, heavy things with dancefloor-friendly rock in recent years (QOTSA, Royal Blood, Royal Republic…), marrying thick guitars with even chunkier, sassier beats and bass lines. Now, Brighton-based trio Demob Happy are offering their own trippy spin on it. Imagine *Sgt Pepper*-era Beatles morphed into a disco ball with Royal Blood and you'll have a good idea of this juddering, chest-grabbing new single. We can see the strobe lights and packed clubs already.
demob-happy.com

MARISA & THE MOTHS: ROB BLACKHAM/PRESS; DEMOB HAPPY: RICHARD STOW/PRESS

And keep an ear out for... The Bites

Earache Records' latest signings are rag-tag Hollywood gang The Bites. They play unabashedly retro rock'n'roll like it's the only thing that matters in the world, and it's a ton of fun. We've had a peek at what's to come (single *Do Me A Favour* is out now), and it's kinda brilliant. Basic, yes, but superbly executed, mixing 80s flash with meat-'n'-potatoes hooks and grooves; a bit like Status Quo offering their answer to Van Halen. And who in their right mind doesn't want to hear that?
earache.com/artists/the-bites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P86
Alice Cooper
Colourful, easy-read new compendium is Wonderland for Alice fans.

The Hard Stuff
The Ultimate Rock Reviews Section

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Classic Rock Ratings

Rating	
10/10	A Classic
9/10	Excellent
8/10	Very Good
7/10	Good
6/10	Above Average
5/10	Average
4/10	Below Par
3/10	A Disappointment
2/10	Pants
1/10	Pish

Ingredients:

P74 Albums
P82 Reissues
P86 DVDs & Books
P88 Buyer's Guide

Edited By Ian Fortnam
ian.fortnam@futurenet.com

THE HARD STUFF
ALBUMS

OMMASO OTTOMANO/PRESS

Måneskin

Rush! EPIC

Not a tribute to Geddy, Alex and Neil.

For some, suspicion about Måneskin's rise to prominence persists, as if a young, sexy rock band who appeal to young, sexy rock fans shouldn't be able to sell out London's O2 six months ahead of show time without first having spent a few winters trudging up and down the M1 in search of approval from a brains trust of grizzled music lovers.

Part of this must surely be down to the way time seems to collapse with age, because the truth of the band's 'sudden' rise is that the gap between their TikTok-busting cover of the Four Seasons' classic *Beggin'* and the arrival of new album *Rush!* is less than the time between Jimmy Page leaving The Yardbirds and the release of Led Zep's *Houses Of The Holy*. Overnight success for young, sexy bands? That was a 70s thing, man.

Rush! is dazzling proof that Måneskin are capable of writing rings around most modern riff monkeys. Exploring arena-friendly turf somewhere between Arctic Monkeys and the Red Hot Chili Peppers, it's an album that bristles with swagger and sass. It's also an album of great economy: none of the 17 songs waste any time getting where they're ultimately going, with opener *Own My Mind* taking approximately three seconds to establish the frisky chug that underpins the Måneskin blueprint.

Things get really interesting on the ballad *Timezone*, which takes a cue from the band's outstanding recent cover of Elvis's *If I Can Dream* (not included on *Rush!*) to wind its way to swelling climax, and on *Bla Bla Bla*, which kicks off with the most detached vocal since the Flying Lizards deliberately sucked the life out of *Money*, and features the brilliantly lazy line *'Ha ha ha-ha-ha ha ha/I wanna fuck, let's go to my spa'*. *Feel* sounds like a youthful contender to replace *Seven Nation Army* on football stadium terraces worldwide, *Kool Kids* was surely written in tribute to Idles, and the Italian-language *LA Fine* picks up where Måneskin's Eurovision-winning *Zitti e Buoni* left off, with Damiano David's breathless vocal riding a riff, and a rhythm that couldn't get any more lively were it comprised entirely of eels. As if to demonstrate their belief in their own material, the album ends with two hit singles: *Supermodel* – with that wonderfully choppy, Frusciante-esque guitar from Thomas Raggi – and *The Loneliest* almost as if they're an afterthought.

Seriously, it's time to believe.

Fraser Lewry

Neverland Ranch Davidians

Neverland Ranch Davidians

HEAVY MEDICATION

Blazing funk-fuelled debut from your new favourite band.

Fronted by Tex Mosley (very probably the only man in history to play with both Pure Hell and Suzi Quatro), defiantly bass-free, two-guitar power trio NRD boast a sound that's as unlikely a hybrid as their once heard, never forgotten name.

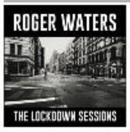
Stoner psych gets its groove on in an irresistible fuzz-funk firefight that calls to mind a tight-but-loose, chitlin circuit-era Hendrix (*Fat Back*), elsewhere there's the overdrive-pedal-to-the-metal freeway head-rush of *Rat Patrol*, swampabilly grunge (the powerfully wrought, George Floyd-inspired *Knee On My Neck*), and Cramps lurch (*Aqua Velveteen*). Hell, to be perfectly honest it's tough to cherry-pick because every which way you turn there's a dynamite tune: *Liquor Store*'s knowingly *Marquee Moon*-quoting punk flurry; *Boys Don't Cry*'s sneeringly catchy barbed hook; *Hen House* with its ass-quaking head-on collision of Famous Flames and Stooges…

File under 'Future Classic'.

Ian Fortnam

Roger Waters

The Lockdown Sessions EP LEGACY



He sounds quieter, more desperate here: six songs that are gentler yet oddly more unsettling reworkings of Pink Floyd and solo favourites, recorded during the lockdowns of 2020 and 2021. It's almost like he's confronting his own mortality: the voice in places reminiscent of 70s Dylan and Lennon, at other times very obviously Roger Waters.

Comfortably Numb 2022 sounds chilling, resigned, as Water strips the original of its former grandeur and circumstance (and guitar solos), as the distance of age grows more and more pronounced. *Mother* is saddened, acoustic. Standout solo track *The Bravery Of Being Out Of Range* is dark and gorgeous in its stark vulnerability. *Two Suns In The Sunset* is dark indeed. Songs seemingly chosen for the lyrical relevance to present times.

This album may alienate some fans due to its gloom, but it showcases an artist who is still very much alive and alert to the changing tides of life.

Everett True

King Cujo

Lost Inside The Landfill

WWW.KINGCUJO.COM

Look up in anger

The last time King Cujo released an album, they were young, angry and frantic (and they didn't have the 'King' in their name). Now they're grown up, angry and focused. And the London trio are not happy with the state of the nation.

Album opener *Down Here* is a warning shot, signalled by a pummelling riff and a forceful guitar break, a rallying call to the downtrodden who are *'sat with a devil who's hungry for sin'*. Into *The Heavy Snow* has a throbbing bass and solid drums setting up some raw guitar chords and angry vocals. *Bed Of Nails* tries to play it steady but can't disguise its volatile nature.

The mental cost of this dislocation is itemised on *Making No Sound* – *'I'm making no sound, I'll never be found'* – while *In The Vein* invokes the darker image of *'a lamb to the wolf pack'*. There are no cosy clichés to soften the blow.

Hugh Fielder

Fantastic Negrito

Grandfather Courage

COOKING VINYL

Creative left-turn from genre-hopping Oakland funkateer.

It's been a circuitous route to triple-Grammy-winning success for Xavier Dphrepaulezz, aka Fantastic Negrito. Now 55, he signed a record deal with Interscope in 1993. A near-fatal car crash six years later almost derailed his career, then came the creative reinvention that began with his 2016 album *The Last Days Of Oakland*.

Grandfather Courage, an acoustic reimagining of 2022's acclaimed *White Jesus Black Problems* recorded with his touring band, re-tells the story of the love affair between his seventh-generation Scottish grandmother and African-American grandfather in 1750s Virginia. *Oh Betty* is the biggest benefactor from this stripped-back approach, its feverish howl of anguish ever more potent as

a rootsy funk lament. *Highest Bidder* is recalibrated as swampy blues, while an 11-minute *They Go Low* is transformed into a supper-club jazz instrumental. If the reduction of his anything-goes sonic palette sometimes comes at the cost of his eclecticism – the wacko disco groove of *Trudoo* replaced by a brush-assisted shuffle – it's still an intriguing stop-gap on a fascinating journey.

Paul Moody

Wig Wam

Out Of The Dark FRONTIERS

Scandinavia's luckiest hard rockers make hay while the sun shines.

Director and 80s rock fan James Gunn could have picked any band to provide the theme song for his hit glam-metal-fuelled superhero series *Peacemaker*, but he plumped instead for 2010's *Do You Wanna Taste It* by obscure Norwegian hair farmers Wig Wam.

Their first album since that unexpected stroke of good fortune doubles down what attracted Gunn to them. *Out Of The Dark* lays the strutting melodies and blockbusting choruses like grunge, nu metal and the last 30 years in general never happened. The pouting title track would have been in heavy rotation on MTV in 1988, *The Purpose* is a genuinely great hard-rock ballad, while the (hopefully) tongue-in-cheek *Ghosting You* clumsily embraces the bad-boy clichés: '*They ripped off your panties in a pile of cocaine*,' howls singer Glam (yes, really) as guitarist Teeny (ditto) peels off another heavied-up CC DeVille riff.

Pop-cultural lightning is unlikely to strike twice, but *Out Of The Dark* is still an enjoyable slice of fake nostalgia.

Dave Everley

Electric Mob

2 Make U Cry & Dance

FRONTIERS MUSIC S.R.L.

Strutting, stomping rock'n'roll from (way) south of the border.

There's more than a tinge of the Sunset Strip to the strut and thrust of Electric Mob, but thankfully the Brazilian newcomers leave the preening and inflated egos at the door.

2 Make U Cry & Dance thrums with the same palpable wild-eyed hunger that fuelled *Powerage* and *Appetite For Destruction*, with the likes of *It's Gonna Hurt, By The Name, Saddest Funk Ever* and *Thy Kingdom Come* taking glam's self-assuredness and affixing it to rough-and-rowdy rock'n'roll. In truth, Electric Mob share more in spirit with the likes of the Quireboys, Little Angels or Ugly Kid Joe than with the likes of Mötley Crüe or Ratt, every sky-splitting wail and massive riff in service of producing the music they so clearly love.

If their 2020 debut was about announcing their arrival to the world, *2 Make U Cry & Dance* is Electric Mob kicking doors down to preach the gospel: rock'n'roll is still king.

Rich Hobson

Lovebites

Judgement Day JPU

Hardcore band deliver plenty of meat and veg, but no spice.

Joyous, bombastic and gloriously OTT, Japan's Lovebites home in on the wild abandon at the heart of power metal with *Judgement Day*, their fourth full-length record. Where the likes of Sabaton and Powerwolf play up to heavy metal's panto elements with a knowing nudge and wink towards the inherent cheesiness of their craft, Lovebites play things straight, going hell for leather with no hint of irony or self-consciousness.

That said, they do still embrace theatricality, albeit with a sense of scale that makes every track feel truly epic. From the Maiden-like gallops on *Lost In The Garden* to the decidedly thrashy *Dissonance* and *Stand And Deliver (Shoot 'Em Down)* – where newcomer Fami delivers the greasiest bass tone since Motörhead – the album plays out like a love letter to the 'music conquers all' energy of classic heavy metal, songs like *The Spirit Lives On* spotlighting the irrepressible positivity and vitality that makes Lovebites so utterly brilliant.

Rich Hobson

Van Morrison

Moving On Skiffle EXILE

Jelly Roll for your Lead Belly.

If skiffle now seems as ancient as the chewing gum on Lonnie Donegan's bedpost, don't tell Van Morrison, because this album is a wonderful homage to musician and historian Chas McDevitt's introduction to a sound that warped via New Orleans and the Delta to Soho and Van's Belfast. Aside from songs here, which include Hoyt Axton's epic *Greenback Dollar*, Elizabeth Cotton's *Freight Train* (given a smart jazz update) and *Green Rocky Road*, familiar from versions by Fred Neil, Dave Van Ronk and Rick Nelson, Morrison fans will enjoy hearing him in fine voice and generous mood. His love for the music shines throughout. *Wish I Was An Apple On A Tree* (one for the teenagers) even features Sticky Wicket's washboard, and backing singers whose contributions recall Van's own good old days. Elsewhere, Civil Rights gospel anthem *This Little Light Of Mine* warms the cockles, and Huddie Ledbetter's *Cotton Fields* still rocks the cradle.

Max Bell

The Winery Dogs

III THREE DOG MUSIC

Who let the dogs out again?

After their 2013 debut and its 2015 follow-up *Hot Streak*, and having toured in 2019, the Winery Dogs – Richie Kotzen (vocals/guitar), Billy Sheehan (bass/vocals) and Mike Portnoy (drums/vocals) – have been back in the studio.

While they insist that when they record, as live, in the room together it's about the song first and the performance second, that's not what comes across when listening to the results. The playing is off-the-scale A-list, but when each number ends, generally that's what lingers, not the melodies. *Xanadu, Breakthrough* and *The Vengeance* are fine attempts, but only *Stars* – at once broody and funky with otherworldly guitar from Kotzen – is superb both while you're listening and in the memory.

A good album, but not great.

Neil Jeffries

ROUND-UP: BLUES

By Henry Yates

JD Simo: new old-soul rock'n'roll

JD Simo

Songs From The House Of Grease CROWS FEET

JD Simo is shaping up as one of the great interpreters of old-soul rock'n'roll. The Nashville-based slide man was drafted to play guitar for the soundtrack of last year's Elvis biopic. Now, Simo's power trio are evidently still running on mojo, rush-recording a cracking covers set whose free-form mastery means these five songs stretch to 40 minutes without anyone checking their watch.

All five tracks earn their keep. A deep exploration of Mississippi Fred McDowell's *Mortgage On My Soul* opens with a keening slide section that suggests Jeff Beck is still in the building, before Simo sprays wild improvisation over scruffy drums. He breaks the lazy swing of John Coltrane's *Afro Blue* to fire scat riffs through the wash of cymbals, while Blind Alfred Reed's world-beaten standard *How Can A Poor Man Stand Such Times And Live* has never sounded so salient ('*Politicians got vacation homes and the teachers can't pay their rent/Temperatures rising, mother nature's pissed...*').

Jarrod Dickenson

Big Talk HOOKED

Famed for his connoisseur collection of six-strings, Dickenson's profile among guitar-heads will only be elevated by the instrument he used to record *Big Talk* (a '56 Gretsch Silver Jet). Even for those less axe-oriented, there's much to love here, with the jangle-crunch of *Buckle Under Pressure* and *Prefer To Lose* proving he has the ideas as well as the gear.

Ledfoot

Coffin Nails PIAS

Briefly dragged overground when Bruce Springsteen covered his song *High Hopes* in 2014, Tim Scott McConnell operates best in the shadows as Ledfoot, his self-styled 'gothic blues' woven on a ghostly 12-string with brass slide. Highlights like *Perdition* and *Better Than Bad* are fire-throated gallows anthems that turn the skies black.

Connor Selby

Connor Selby MASCOT/PROVOGUE

Strictly speaking, this album arrived in 2021, but after the shop window of last year's Pearl Jam support at Hyde Park and with Mascot's marketing muscle now flexing for him, this re-release should send Selby stratospheric. There's prime material here, from *Emily*'s hot-valve crunch to the Laurel Canyon strum of *Waitin' On The Day*, all set off by his winningly lugubrious vocals.

Matt Andersen

The Big Bottle Of Joy SONIC

The stripped acoustic stylings of last year's *House To House* were a welcome diversion, but with the return of his full band *The Big Bottle Of Joy* uncorks the atmosphere that Andersen does best. On *Let It Slide* his lusty vocal is carried by busy barrelhouse blues and hyperactive backing vocals, and even the bruised *Golden* feels like it's dying to blossom into a rave-up.

The Answer

Sundowners GOLDEN ROBOT

Return of the Northern Irish blues brothers.

Some bands strive so hard for authenticity when trying to recapture what they imagine to be the 70s spirit of blues-drenched, bell-bottomed rock'n'roll, that it ends up having the opposite effect and starts to look and sound like they've been raiding the dressing-up box, the scent of pastiche and patchouli lying heavy in the air. Others, though, don't have to try too hard because they naturally have the essential spirit running through their veins, their motivation nothing more and nothing less than a pure and deep love of the music, and an innate understanding of how to conjure it from their souls. It's impossible to fake. The Answer are very much in the latter category.

The Northern Irish quartet have been missing in action for the past seven years, having made the sensible decision to step back and reset for their own mental, physical and creative wellbeing. The break has clearly done them the world of good, because *Sundowners* is a joyful explosion of restless grooves, warming Hammond, chirping harmonica and beautiful, flawless harmonising from their female backing singers, the glitter to counter and complement the grit of frontman Cormac Neeson's earnest rasp.

The touchstones are obvious but perfectly pitched. *Cold Heart* could have come straight from Free's back catalogue, a strutting party starter laden with immaculate riffs and Neeson's endlessly soulful, seemingly effortless vocals, and there's a cock-sure confidence straight from the AC/DC school of showmanship. Rhythm and dust meets attitude and lust on the unashamedly libidinous *Oh Cherry*, but elsewhere it's more about the mood than the meaning, the title track delivering hypnotic, shamanic, fire-lit beats that speak of hazy, altered-reality weekends spent under the stars, taking in the enormity of the universe while out of your noodle. It's perfectly pitched for festival crowds to lose themselves to, neatly plotted into the set-list so it's timed to salute the sun as it slips over the horizon.

This album is the sound of a band with nothing to prove to themselves or anyone else. They're not trying to challenge you, or to reinvent the wheel, they're just conducting emotion, a raw feeling, and communicating it beautifully to their audience. And that's why they slot in so neatly alongside the blues-rock giants that came before them – not because they've forensically studied and replicated their predecessors, but because they know instinctively that it comes from the heart, and that's something that can't be forced.

Emma Johnston

Gina Birch

I Play My Guitar Loud

THIRD MAN

An old Raincoat never lets you down.

This is marvellous: a good-natured, poignant, very human and sometimes very angry romp through the punk and reggae and art-school and experimental and feminist and noisy vistas that The Raincoats founder Gina Birch has both informed and been informed by throughout her inspirational life. Punk as raw expression.

Some songs chill, some songs thrill. Single *Wish I Was You* propels alienation and hope in a way Elastica never did. *Feminist Song* and *I Am Rage* – two obvious standouts and obvious anthems – don't flinch from truth or free expression; *I Will Never Wear Stilettos* is smartly, brilliantly caustic and funny.

For Raincoats fans this is most similar to their underrated third album *Moving*, for its fluent, danceable, off-kilter rhythms. For everyone else it's a marvel waiting to be discovered.

Everett True

Steel Panther

On The Prowl STEEL PANTHER INC.

The joke is over on the comedy-metallers flaccid sixth album.

Steel Panther's ongoing existence is one of the great mysteries of the modern era. What started out as a genuinely funny piss-take of both hair metal bands and the people who hated them has descended into a joyless parade of wanking gags, 'gash' references and hack-metal proficiency.

The bewigged bozos' sixth album is a re-run of past (in) glories, forlornly tugging itself off in a motel sink as it wonders how many times it can squeeze the word 'blowjob' into its 13 tracks. *It's Never Too Late (To Get Some Pussy Tonight)* and *Friends With Benefits* make the band's old chestnuts *Death To All But Metal* and *Community Property* sound like staggering works of comedic genius, although the shimmering *Magical Vagina* is a genuinely great song, title and lyrics aside.

And that's the rub: Steel Panther are trapped by their own shtick. Take away the tired dick gags and 'comedy' homophobia, and they'd be a decent rock band who nobody would be interested in. All the Viagra in the world can't save this one.

Dave Everley

Hundred Reasons

Glorious Sunset SO RECORDINGS

Glorious sunset, glorious return from the British alternative-rock favourites.

It's 15 years since Hundred Reasons last released an album. In the interim, guitarist Larry Hibbitt has been working as an in-demand producer. And it really shows, because this new album *gleams*. It may be two decades since they first led the heady, turn-of-the-century wave of young British rock, but they've never sounded so confident.

There's a delicate balance at work. The title track is a deeply emotional piece focusing on the death of frontman Colin Doran's mother, that also puts a pin in the map to identify the perfect crossroads of ultra-hooky pop choruses and the tough post-hardcore they made their name with. The delicate piano and strings of *Replicate*, meanwhile, offer a sweet, chalk-and-cheese contrast to Doran's powerful bellow.

This could so easily have been an exercise in nostalgia, but, packed with irresistible melodies, air-punchable riffs and visceral energy, it's the sound of a band living firmly in the here and now, making music for the sheer joy of it. And that joy is infectious. It's good to have them back.

Emma Johnston

Babymetal

The Other One COOKING VINYL

Haven't they grown?

The inventors of 'cute metal', Japan's Babymetal have weathered the loss of founder member Yuimetal and survived 13 years in showbusiness without any essential deviation from their extraordinary mission plan, which on one level is to follow the orders of their mentor the Fox God and lead the Metal Resistance, and on another is to combine the sweet harmonies of J-Pop with the furious guitars of thrash metal. The result is razor-sharp metal riffs behind cute songs about chocolate and girls, like *Gimme Chocolate* and

Elevator Girl. *The Other One*, their third album, sees the band refining their sound with slightly more thoughtful chord changes, contemplative voice-overs ("Maybe what you see is all an illusion") and moments of harmonic progression, but not too many.

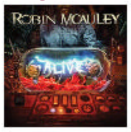
This is the maturing of cute metal, and it's still nuts.

David Quantick

Robin McAuley

Alive FRONTIERS

Much-travelled singer delivers the goods.



A gap of 22 years separated the first two solo albums from Robin McAuley, but the Irish singer has wasted little time in following the most recent one, 2021's *Standing On The Edge*. Once again produced by Frontiers' in-house workaholic Alessandro Del Vecchio, who besides chipping in with numerous writing credits also plays bass and keyboards, *Alive* sticks close to the format of its well-received predecessor.

A year away from entering his 70s, McAuley – the raspy, towering voice of Grand Prix, the McAuley-Schenker Group, Far Corporation and, most recently, the 'supergroup' Black Swan – still sounds distinctive. Better still, he's still capable of hitting all the notes, singing with commendable power, notably on the heavyweight *Dead As A Bone*, *Feel Like Hell* and *Fading Away*. But while the material is perhaps marginally meatier than one might have been expected, the choruses are, for the most part, memorable.

Dave Ling

Haken

Fauna INSIDEOUTMUSIC

Brit-prog standard bearers take a walk on the wild side.

After the knotty, inward-looking one-two of 2018's *Vector* and its 2020 companion album *Virus*, London prog-metallers Haken's seventh album finds them opening up musically and metaphorically. Drawing inspiration from both the animal kingdom (track titles include *Taurus*, *Nightingale* and *Elephants Never Forget*) and visionary sci-fi authors such as Phillip K Dick, it's a commentary on the world around us and our place in it, as well as our own relationships with our inner selves.

While the band occasionally lean into heavy-duty prog showboating (the 11, shape-shifting minutes of *Elephants Never Forget* seem designed to test the listener's tolerance for wilful awkwardness), elsewhere they let their oddball-pop flag fly high: *Lovebites* has a coruscating chorus, while the glitchy *Beneath The White Rainbow* could be Imagine Dragons with a King Crimson record under their arm. That Haken's musicianship is impeccable is a given, and it's matched here with a playfulness that's a rare currency in the world of prog-metal.

Dave Everley

Delain

Dark Waters NAPALM

More is more for these Dutch symphonic metallers.

So, having announced the band's dissolution in early 2021, Delain return with a new album and a revamped line-up, which, crucially, features vocalist Diana Leah in place of Charlotte Wessels. Things change, but some things remain (almost) the same. Being a smart chap, Delain mastermind and keyboard player Martijn Westerholt has retained all the elements that the fans love, and Leah fits in seamlessly, her ethereal vocals weaving lithely betwixt the crunching riffs and thunderous drums. Really, who does bombastic symphonic metal quite like Delain? We have an epic choir on *Underland* and *The Cold*, a superb mini-opera in the shape of *Invictus* and acres of brutal riffing, sublime pop melodies and sweeping arrangements throughout – *Mirror Of Night* and *Tainted Hearts* are particularly impressive. This is the sound of a band absolutely going for it, and for sheer scale and drama this album is hard to beat.

Essi Berelian

The Cold Stares

Voices MASCOT

Indiana blues rockers flex their muscles as a trio on album six.

For 10 years The Cold Stares built their name as a duo. Now the addition of a bassist has afforded them new ingredients without sacrificing the wildness that drew us to them in the first place. This is blues rock as it should be, as you *want* it to be – crammed with cinematic storytelling, and enriched with Chris Tapp's vocal blend of velvet and raw heat.

Inspired by the Delta pioneers but not trying to mimic them, *Voices* is full of stories and old-world darknesses, contrasts that haunt, move and entertain. Thematically it plants the genre in contemporary soil, showing that the blues needn't be an exercise in pre-written nostalgia. *Nothing But The Blues* is an exhilarating update of the old 'woke up this morning' adage, while *The Joy* peers into the bittersweet passage of relationships – a bit like hearing Hendrix's *Little Wing* revisited by Alice In Chains.

If you gravitate towards the blues, and you don't already have The Cold Stares in your life, then consider this a friendly but firm steer in their direction.

Polly Glass

In Flames

Foregone NUCLEAR BLAST

In Sweden, death metal is pop music.

Swedish melodic death metal heroes In Flames have been a lot of things in their nearly 30 years. They've tinkered with the formula to various levels of success, sometimes leaning into arena-bound hard rock, gothic indulgences or the more youthful stomp of metalcore.

At this point they've been around long enough to do whatever the hell they want, but *Foregone* mostly sticks with the classic melo-death formula, and blistering tracks like *The Great Deceiver* and *State Of Slow Decay* drip with politically charged venom and skull-shattering riffs. As is their wont, there's also the clean-vocal whine and teen-baiting metalcore stomp of *Pure Light Of Mind* and *A Dialogue In B-Flat Minor*. Skip a coupla duff tracks and you've got a monster.

Sleazegrinder

ROUND-UP: MELODIC ROCK

By Dave Ling

Creye: an exciting modern twist on the great melodic rock of the 80s.

Creye

III Weightless FRONTIERS

In an age when things always seem to let us down, thank God for Creye. Formed in 2015, these six Swedes have carved a reputation for being among the most reliable bands of the Scandi-rock scene, despite changing their vocalist after their self-titled debut from '18. Since then Creye have tinkered with their sound but not radically changed its core: an exciting modern twist on the great melodic rock of the 80s, rammed home via robust rhythms.

Album number three sees the band going slightly heavier than before, yet without removing the blinkers. Producer Jacob Gustafsson has found a joyous synchronicity between the dancing, fulsome keyboards and the guitars. Now firmly established as the band's voice, August Rauer is equally distinguished on harder numbers like *Spreading Fire*, *Air*, *In The Shadows* and the sensational title track which falls somewhere between power ballad and a chugging, fist-in-the-air anthem, Rauer commanding the mic in a manner befitting Myles Kennedy.

Congratulations, Creye, you've done it again.

Remedy

Something That Your Eyes Won't See S-ROCK MUSIC

Such is the overall air of class and sophistication, it's rather mind-boggling to believe that this is Remedy's debut. Big hooks, cool vocals, crunching guitars, killer production… this album has it all. Had the Stockholm-based combo released it in December it would have been a no-brainer for those end-of-year accolades.

T3nors

Naked Soul FRONTIERS

As any fool knows, great AOR bands are judged by the quality of their lead singer. T3nors feature three such precious unicorns: Robbie LaBlanc from Find Me and Blanc Faces, Pride Of Lions' Toby Hitchcock, and Kent Hilli (Perfect Plan and Giant). As a vehicle for vocal showboating, this album achieves that intended goal with ease, although its saccharine qualities overwhelm.

First Signal

Face Your Fears FRONTIERS

It's hard not to feel sympathy for vocalist Harry Hess, whose every effort will always be judged against his other group, Harem Scarem. Those are some sky-high standards to meet. However, *Fears* remains a rather fine First Signal record, with Italian producer Michele Guaitoli having polished songs such as *Shoot The Bullet* and *In The Name Of Love* to perfection.

The Flood

Hear Us Out ESCAPE MUSIC

Fans of FM will be intrigued by this collusion of the band's current guitarist Jim Kirkpatrick with original keyboard player Didge Digital. The ever-impressive vocals of Chris Ousey and a rhythm team comprising bassist Billy Sheehan and Saxon's Nigel Glockler on percussion completes a stellar line-up. Full of bluesy, emotional goodness, it's an imposing debut.

The Long Ryders

September November CHERRY RED

Less a comeback, more a continuation of a vital musical legacy.

Band reunions are frequently daunting high-wire balancing acts as much for the fans as they are for the band. On the one hand, long-term supporters get to bask in the warmth of their youth; a reminder of days gone by when life was a long path stretching ahead and chores could always be put off until tomorrow. On the other, the band in question can line up one more pay day before bidding each other a final farewell. But what to make of those groups who want one more round in the studio? Will they add to their legacy, or fall to the floor by sullying it with substandard tosh that does no one any favours?

As evidenced by 2019's *Psychedelic Paisley Soul* – their first album in more than 30 years – The Long Ryders not only defined their oeuvre, but actually picked up where they left off. And now, proving that it was no fluke, *September November* refines their sound further with a lyrically contemplative look at the ongoing march of time, while pausing to shake a disappointed head at the state of our union and beyond.

One of the progenitors of alt.country, having first come along back in 1982, The Long Ryders' sound remains firmly in place. For sure, this is country rock, but not the overly produced variant that prizes smoothness over grit. This is a band who are still captivated by the possibilities of what the form can offer. But, with the passing of bassist Tom Stevens, they are facing up to mortality within an off-kilter world, with an approach that's neither maudlin nor hectoring.

Opener *Seasons Change* sets out its stall early, a thematic declaration of what's to come. The music is bright and dynamic, belying its lyrical concerns, and these seeming disparities mesh beautifully. *Elmer Gantry Is Alive And Well*, driven by a sense of tension that recalls the Velvet Underground's *I'm Waiting For The Man*, is unstinting in its condemnation of the 2021 attack on the US Capitol and those behind it, while *The Hand of Fate*'s tender meditation on mortality is matched by the celebratory tribute to their fallen bassist on *Tom Tom*.

The Long Ryders are older now but, crucially, they don't sound old. By making music that reflects on their lives both personally and also as part of a wider, global community, they're managing that high-wire balancing act without the use of a safety net.

Julian Marszalek

Witch Ripper

The Flight After the Fall

MAGNETIC EYE

Finally, sludge you can bring home to mum!

These are exciting times to be alive. As the moniker would suggest, Witch Ripper burst into life in 2018 as a hoary sludge-stoner outfit, high as proverbial kites, their riffs dripping in offal. One pandemic later and the Minneapolis trio have transformed dramatically into a rather majestic prog-metal band, cosmic in scope and psychedelic in approach. Of course, there's probably enough Mastodon aftertaste to soothe the savages among us. *The Obsidian Forge*, for example, is pure face-raking sludge-metal, and the 16-minute epic closer *Everlasting In Retrograde Part 1 & 2* successfully fuses Witch Ripper's twin obsessions with sparkling beauty and dense, brutal ugliness. This is no rave to the grave, though. Curtis Parker's soaring, clean vocals and space-streaking guitar sheen elevates *The Flight After The Fall* to new starry-eyed vistas, like Coheed And Cambria soundtracking a space flight to Venus with Ghost's Tobias Forge at the controls.

Is post-sludge a thing? If so, then this is most definitely it. And it will probably go down as one of the most effortlessly adventurous albums of the year. If you have a toad handy, commence licking it.

Sleazegrinder

Blak29

The Waiting CLEOPATRA

Zing is back in black.

Following up 2016's *Love And Anger*, Samhain/Danzig fella Steve Zing continues his collaboration with Dan Tracey (Marra's Drug) for more punishing horror-punk bleakness. With Prong guitarist Tommy Victor and The 69 Eyes vocalist Jyrki 69 guesting, the result is potent, dark and addictive, with Zing delivering his vocals in a style not dissimilar to an ultra-violent Ian Astbury, all *Sonic Temple* wolf howls and nightmare visions.

Taut bruisers *Blackout, Bleeding Love* and *Go Go Little One* are the pick of the bunch for full-tilt rockers, while the serpentine title track and the claustrophobic *I Am Screaming (But Nobody Hears)* allow Zing to pile on the gloomy atmospherics. For plain weirdness, *Destroyer*, featuring Victor and Jyrki, owes more than a snakebite and black to The Kinks' *All Day And All Of The Night*, and closer *Long Cool Woman* (again with Jyrki) rocks like a goth AC/DC.

Bring on the night.

Essi Berelian

Death Valley Girls

Islands In The Sky

SUICIDE SQUEEZE

Garage-psych rockers hit a new peak.

Death Valley Girls are cooking up one hell of a brew. While the basic ingredients include garage rock'n'roll, a soupçon of surfing vibes, a generous pinch of psychedelic wooziness and a dollop of the occult, here they ramp up their fourth album with a greater degree of melodicism and hook-laden songwriting. In the process, not only have they delivered a collection that stands up to repeated plays, it also actually demands them.

The slow-burning menace of *California Mountain Shake* that front-ends the album proves to be a red herring. Both *Magic Powers* and *Watch The Sky* are swirling apparitions that share an aesthetic with *Ladytron* as a rock'n'roll twilight gives way to dancing in the dark. The echo that drenches the vocals throughout expands the sound, not least on the insanely catchy title track. Elsewhere the hymn-like *Sunday* packs a stunning aural trip into just over three minutes.

Their best album yet.

Julian Marszalek

Stargazer

Life Will Never Be The Same MIGHTY MUSIC

Norwegian trad-metal stalwarts fine-tune the formula.

Oslo quintet Stargazer were no spring chickens when they formed in the late noughties, but in middle age they seem to be finding new ways of revitalising an old-school hard rock sound.

As well as operatic vocal howls, chugging riff volleys and some well-placed shredding, opener *Can You Conceive It* employs a neat key change to boost a memorably windswept

chorus. *Don't Kill* is an air-punching anthem that would have heads banging and moshpits chanting in any era. *Will I Come To Heaven* summons the mystically fixated spirit of Dio before launching into a thrilling power-metal gallop. As a pace breaker, *Live Today* is a power ballad that would slot neatly into a vintage Scorpions record.

The same, but different enough.

Johnny Sharp

Transatlantic

The Final Flight INSIDE OUT

Decisions – who needs them?

Sticking to Transatlantic drummer Mike Portnoy's dictum that "more of anything is never enough", progmeisters Transatlantic leave us – if indeed they really are leaving us – with a fourth, live, version of their *Absolute Universe* album, having already released three versions of the 2019 record because they couldn't agree on an edit.

You can rest assured that nobody has dared tamper with the live version – although it does beg the question of how Portnoy, Neal Morse and the other band members decided which songs to play – which was recorded at Paris Olympia at the end of their tour last year.

Transatlantic fans will be delighted, of course, particularly those who bought *The Absolute Universe Demos* to add to their collection, but less committed fans might find the unwavering consistency of the tracks a little wearisome at times. There's also room for a few career highlights, although how these were chosen is anyone's guess.

Hugh Fielder

Brian Jonestown Massacre

Your Future Is Your Past A

Psychedelic overlords' Berlin-period purple patch continues.

Thirty-two years on from BJM's debut single *She Made Me*, Anton Newcombe's one-man mission to convert the world to the joys of lysergic shoegaze shows no sign of letting up.

Written and recorded in Berlin during the Great Pause, their twentieth studio album continues where 2022's excellent *Fire Doesn't Grow On Trees* left off, its anthemic feel a creative response to news feeds mainlining war and crisis.

'Give it all you've got, it's the only way to live,' he advises in *Do Rainbows Have Ends*, a moving missive to his son Wolfgang. *The Light Is About To Change* is a pile-driving ode to self-assertion in which he growls: *'Everybody's lost their minds'*.

Throw in blasts of shimmering Madchester-era power-pop (*Your Mind Is My Cafe*), Farfisa organ-assisted balladry (*As The Carousel Swings*) and – naturally – a large dash of vitriol (the thunderous *The Mother Of All Fuckers*), and you've got another classic BJM album.

Paul Moody

Laura Cox

Head Above Water EARMUSIC

Anglo-French former YouTube star delivers an album of bracing trad-rock.

From the opening, title track (with its rather awkward mixed metaphor of running away while keeping your head above water), it's clear that Laura Cox is a guitarist who's seeking to push the rock envelope into the 21st century. The unpolished but proficient rock dynamic of, say, *One Big Mess* would have been in its element 50 years ago, while *Set Me Free*'s bottleneck stylings are reminiscent of Led Zep's *When The Levee Breaks*.

Time was when this mode of playing was suffocatingly dominant, but not so today; as Cox says, her style of rock isn't so popular in France these days, and getting a hearing hasn't been easy. It's genuinely nice that someone is bothering to preserve the craft of yesteryear. That said, *Seaside* and *Glassy Day*, with their clever use of mandolin and slide, represent a hint at evolution.

David Stubbs

Andy Fairweather Low

Flang Dang THE LAST MUSIC CO

High-pitched hitmaker and guitar sideman returns to solo.

After *Let Ya Beedle Lam Bam*, *La Booga Rooga* and *Be Bop 'N' Holla* from the Welsh high-pitched singer and guitarist, now comes *Flang Dang*.

The former Amen Corner singer, and more recently rhythm-guitar sidekick for Eric Clapton and Roger Waters, has recorded and toured with his band the Low Riders since 2006. This release finds Fairweather Low back as a solo artist, having sung and played everything on it except drums, in a stint at the legendary Rockfield Studios during lockdown.

It's a fine tribute to his musical heritage including rockabilly, R&B and a touch of ska, coupled with wry, reflective lyrics. *Got Me A Party* (*'When I fall down seven times I get up eight'*) brings forth the wide-eyed legless spirit of Hank Williams. A master not only of nonsense titles but also of wistful sentiment (see 2006's *Hymn 4 My Soul*, covered by Joe Cocker), on *At The End Of All The Roads*, he strikes lyrical gold again.

Claudia Elliott

Gaz Coombes

Turn The Car Around

HOT FRUIT/VIRGIN

Fourth time around for ex-Supergrass leader.

In the five years since his last solo album *World's Strongest Man*, Gaz Coombes has revived Supergrass, suggesting that Britpop's finest 90s trio might be unfinished business. But it transpired that new material clearly wasn't part of the agenda, and the band were content to enjoy a run of live shows that culminated in last September's Taylor Hawkins tribute at Wembley.

Their erstwhile leader was instead keeping his powder dry for *Turn The Car Around*, which continues his maturation into a thoughtful and eloquent singer-songwriter. There's less zing and immediacy to Coombes's songs these days, replaced by textural layers that crest into shimmery art-rock and faintly psychedelic pop. He can still set the heart pumping, though, particularly on the Beck-ish *Feel Loop (Lizard Dream)* and the wonderful *This Love*, with a muted bass riff that feels like a cousin of *World's Strongest Man* standout *The Oaks*. His trusted helpers – Garo Nahoulakian, Nick Fowler, Piney Gir, The Roxys – are here too, plus Ride drummer Loz Colbert. All of which makes for a rewarding journey that delights in a celebration of friendship, inclusivity and *'this crazy dream of our utopia'*.

Rob Hughes

BEST OF THE REST

Other new releases out this month.

Tragedy

I Am Woman NAPALM

NYC's 'disco metal' tribute tweak a largely played out Dread Zeppelin/Me First template (reinterpreting classics from one genre with the riffs and clichés of another). A tired novelty that fails to maintain its limited appeal beyond track two. **4/10**

George Hennessey

If You Can't Find What You're Looking For Please Ask

FACTORY 92

Remember that deluge of soundalike albums that absolutely nobody expected in the wake of Oasis's overblown blizzard of cocaine über-Britpop minorpiece *Be Here Now*? Well, here it is. And, incredibly, it's not at all bad. **7/10**

The Telescopes

Experimental Health WEISSKALT

While haunted by the ghost of the band's psych-pop past, this fourteenth album is deeper, darker, trippier. Recorded on "broken toys and cheap synths" by sole surviving 'Scope Stephen Lawrie, it's elegiac, claustrophobic and contagiously disturbed. **6/10**

The Inspector Cluzo

Horizon F.THEBASSPLAYER

"Running a family farm is more rock than playing rock'n'roll," claim this Gascony duo. And they ought to know, as they do both. Produced by Vance Powell, this ninth (specifically a searing *The Outsider*) sounds an awful lot like the activist rockers' defining magnum opus. **8/10**

Ryan Hamilton

Haunted By The Holy Ghost WICKED COOL

This 'hit'-packed third from the Texan singer-songwriter carries all the hallmarks of power-pop genius: irresistible Scissor Sisters funk (*Asshole*), Del Amitri Americana (*Absence Of Love*), a punk-friendly sneer, deft key changes. Crafty, catchy, cool. One for the ages. **8/10**

Skull Practitioners

Negative Stars IN THE RED

A power trio they may be, but the improvisational chops of this NYC band (featuring ex-Dream Syndicate guitarist Jason Victor) are more Black Flag than Cream. There's an intrinsic darkness reminiscent of the Damned/Gun Club at this debut's very core. Heavy psych 2.0. **7/10**

Die Like Gentlemen

Last Night On Earth DRINK THIS MUSIC

With a potent combination of tumultuous power, lyrical imagination and explorative ingenuity (that simultaneously calls to mind Sabbath, Priest and Tool), Portland's DLG engage, entertain and ultimately bludgeon doubting metal sceptics into abject submission. **8/10**

John Diva & The Rockets Of Love

The Big Easy STEAMHAMMER/SPV

Aiming for hair-metal cliché, JD overshoots his chosen generic runway so spectacularly that it's impossible not to admire his chutzpah. Full-cream gang harmonies ooze, stunt guitars swoop, and for 46 ludicrous minutes life's a bandana 'n' shades pebbled beach. **7/10**

Black Belt Eagle Scout

The Land, The Water, The Sky SADDLE CREEK

A spectacular squall of über-MBV sungaze dream-pop propels indigenous Swinowish/Iñupiaq woman Katherine Paul's journey from urban Portland to ancestral lands on the Skagit river. *My Blood Runs Through This Land* floats, crescendos, climaxes… Epic. **7/10**

Jack Harlon & The Dead Crows

Hail To The Underground LUES FUNERAL

An all-guitars-blazing curve-ball from yet another killer band to file under 'New Wave Of Australian Psych Rock'. This must-hear covers album of alt.rock staples (Joy Division's *Day Of The Lords*, Bauhaus's *Dark Entries*) slaughters its sacred cows with aplomb. **7/10**

Hollywood Stars

Still Around GOLDEN ROBOT

Shocking on many levels. Shocking that this ironically ill-starred band (contrived by Kim Fowley back in '73) are still with us, but even more shocking that they're sounding so on-point and vital on this astounding four-track EP. *The Bottom*, appropriately, kicks serious ass. **8/10**

BEST OF THE REST REVIEWS BY IAN FORTNAM

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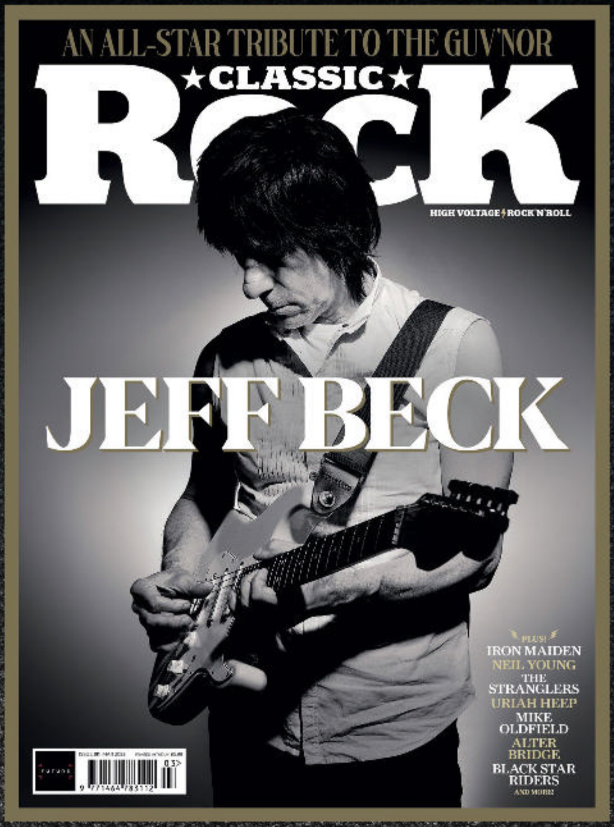

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THE HARD STUFF
REISSUES

Mötley Crüe

Crücial Crüe: The Studio Albums 1981-1989 BMG

Selling Sunset.

Here's a question for ya. How can this limited-edition repackaging of Mötley Crüe's (and we quote) "first five platinum-selling landmark albums" be taken seriously when it omits their very best release? We're talking, of course, about the band's debut full-length, the glam-metal-defining *Too Fast For Love*. Admittedly, said lipstick thriller *is* present here – but not in its original guise, as issued via Leathür Records in 1981.

Working on *Sounds* music weekly at the time, this writer can vividly recall the unheralded but unmistakable arrival of *TFFL*, the postboy cradling a tin-foil-encased package seemingly beamed down from a mysterious spaceship. With Britain in the grimy grip of NWOBHM fever, and with glamour at a premium on these shores, opening this sacred parcel from LA was akin to prising apart a Pandora's Box of forbidden treasures.

The eye was immediately drawn to frontman Vince Neil: waistcoat unzipped to the navel, single fingerless glove, trouser fly secured by bondage twine, his giant haystack hairstyle a not unattractive amalgam of Brian Connolly and Diana Dors. And the music – holy fuck – was all-new, all-exciting, all-electrifying; a veritable nüclear powerhouse straddling peroxide and punk, and propelled by the pulsating guitar riffs of Sir Mick of Mars.

TFFL was picked up quickly by Elektra Records, but its indie-label sonics were deemed too primitive. Queen producer Roy Thomas Baker was brought in to perform deodorising and add Stylophone effects, and the track-listing was subtly altered. This version is included here, alongside the achingly familiar *Shout At The Devil*, *Theatre Of Pain*, *Girls, Girls, Girls* and *Dr Feelgood*. For compare-'n'-contrast purposes, it would've been excellent if both editions of *TFFL* had been provided.

Despite the Crüe's current touring resurgence alongside Def Leppard, it's difficult to imagine who will buy this collection, given that it's a straightforward repacking job with no bonus tracks. The high-end coloured-vinyl edition, featuring such möttled hües as Coke bottle green/oxblood splatter, retails for as much as £150, enough to test the patience of the most fervent Crüe believer.

Like them or loathe them, more than any other band Mötley were *the* embodiment of rock and metal in the 80s. As the Editor of *Kerrang!* for the majority of that decade, there was only one choice of act to adorn the cover of our 100th issue in 1985. But you know these records intimately. It's time to move on. Nothing to see here.

Geoff Barton

Ten Years After

Reissues UMC/PROPER

Jazz-infused UK blues boomers get vinyl upgrade.

The question why Alvin Lee isn't routinely cited alongside Beck, Green, Clapton and Page as one of the great British blues guitarists inevitably rears on these heavyweight reissues of Ten Years After's first two albums.

Produced by Mike Vernon, 1967's *Ten Years After* (**7/10**) rinses popular blues standards such as Willie Dixon's *Spoonful*, Al Kooper's take on Blind Willie Johnson's *I Can't Keep From Crying Sometimes*, and Sonny Boy Williamson's *Help Me* with the burgeoning jazzy swing that more pronounceably imbues Lee's early songwriting stabs.

While the debut was recorded at Decca's West Hampstead studio, 1968's live follow-up *Undead* (**8/10**) was hastily captured at Klooks Kleek, the blues stronghold above the pub next door, hooked up to the studio via cables. Comprised of five lengthy excursions, the set now resonates with the period significance of an Alan Lomax field recording, elevated by the telepathic jazzy swing ignited between drummer Ric Lee, organist Chick Churchill, bassist Leo Lyons and Alvin's mercurial lightning flights on *I May Be Wrong But I Won't Be Wrong Always*, Woody Herman's *Woodchopper's Ball*, and a frenetic *I'm Going Home* presaging the band's Woodstock breakthrough which would culminate in Alvin's 1974 departure.

Kris Needs

Motörhead

Bad Magic: Seriously Bad Magic SILVER LINING

Lemmy's last stand, expanded.

Forty years after Lemmy formed Motörhead, the final line-up with Phil Campbell and Mikkey Dee released *Bad Magic*, their twenty-third and final studio album before their leader passed away four months later. Thankfully, producer Cameron Webb captured the trio on top form, recording tracks live in the studio before lathering them in overdubs.

Bad Magic returns with its buffed-up maelstrom expanded by bells-and-whistles accoutrements, including three out-takes, bonus disc of 2015's rambunctious set at Mt. Fuji Rocks, Lemmy audio interview, and even a somewhat dubious ouija board for braver fans!

Roaring out of the starting blocks with late-period classic *Victory Or Die* instantly establishes the ferocious energy afoot, Lemmy's voice fairly undiminished by the years about to claim him, before surging through roadhouse-razing belters including *Thunder And Lightning*, *Electricity*, *Teach Them How To Bleed* and *Choking On Your Screams* (slow-grinding *The Devil* featuring Brian May).

The multi-format set benefits from diversions that break from the usual onslaught, including a spirited romp through the Stones' *Sympathy For The Devil*, a stirring take on Bowie's "*Heroes*", and stark slowie *Till The End* gaining new poignancy as Lemmy reflects on his life with chilling prescience.

Kris Needs

Rose Tattoo

Beats From A Single Drum GOLDEN ROBOT

The one with *Suddenly* on it.

Conceived as frontman Angry Anderson's debut solo album, contractual obligations led to it being released under his old band's name, even though he was the only founder member on it.

Produced by Kevin Beamish (who seven years earlier scored a No.1 with REO Speedwagon's *Hi Infidelity*) *Beats From A Single Drum* has Anderson embracing synth-pop and horrible drum sounds. It was the 1980s – everyone was doing it.

Although the album rocks (a bit) in places, only closing track *Michael O'Reilly* sounds like Rose Tattoo in their heyday. Elsewhere it ranges from the righteously random (*Winnie Mandela*) to the totally type-busting (ballads *Suddenly* and *Falling*).

Suddenly, though, became a worldwide hit a year later after it featured as the wedding theme for the Scott/Charlene (Kylie/Jason) wedding in *Neighbours*, enabling Anderson to re-release the album under his own name. It sounds no more angry today, though, under the band banner again. Tatts fans beware.

Neil Jeffries

Märvel

Reissues THE SIGN

Swedish rock'n'roll trio give fans a birthday present.

It's always fun when a band celebrates an anniversary, because it's usually an excuse to do something a bit special. And so it is with power trio Märvel.

Rather than simply compile a straightforward 'best of' to mark their 20th birthday, *Double Decade* features 23 remastered tracks – including various impossible-to-find rarities and B-sides – on some eye-catching, highly collectible vinyl. Alongside some cracking old stuff, like *Five Smell City* and *Thunderblood Heart*, there are also a couple of newies – *Catch 22* rips along in classic Märvel style, while *Turn The Page* is melodic and nostalgic in equal measure.

Unlike *Double Decade*, the reissue of third album *Warhawks Of War* is a pretty standard affair; no remastering, just a useful opportunity to pick up their 2011 release in a variety of formats. Their songwriting had become fiercer and more focused (top tunes *TNH* and *The Effort* are on *Double Decade* as well), while live the band abandoned their earlier superhero schtick and introduced the personas of The King, The Vicar and Speedo. Guest appearances from Strings (Hellacopters) and Dregen (Backyard Babies) add some extra fire to a tight set of tunes.

Both

Essi Berelian

Neutral Milk Hotel

Complete Recordings MERGE

The scorched and sublime full works of Jeff Mangum.

When Jeff Mangum mysteriously dropped off-radar for 12 years after the indie success of 1998's *In The Aeroplane Over The Sea*, his second album as mainman with the Elephant 6 collective's Neutral Milk Hotel, he left behind arguably alt.rock's greatest mystery cult. Whether he'd had a breakdown, gone hot-air ballooning across the Atlantic or wound up an incognito late-night DJ in NYC, he'd left fans with a rich and kaleidoscopic catalogue of music to scour for clues.

Self-released by Mangum in 2011 and now receiving a vinyl reissue on Merge, this completist box runs to 54 of the most transportive and consuming songs in the history of underground rock. Through swarms of tape fuzz, bowed saw, sousaphone and experimental sound collage, Mangum bellows his timeless, impassioned folk tunes on an acoustic guitar made, varyingly, of silk and amphetamine. From the ecstatic torrent of apocalyptic images and carnival horns on *Song Against Sex*, through the repeating refrain of *A Baby For Pree* and the gorgeous *Naomi*, 1996's debut *On Avery Island* is an anti-folk revelation bristling with the exuberance of a wide-eyed plunge into adulthood. And inspired partly by Mangum's dreams about Anne Frank, *Aeroplane* is the masterpiece, full of brisk, brilliant, grotesque folk-pop about deformity, lust, religion and death. *Ghost* and *Holland, 1945* are songs of war and its victims that are impossible not to dance to.

Between albums, their tracks are delivered, suitably stark and self-effacing, in a solo coffee-shop setting on the *Live At Jittery Joe's* disc, but it's the *Ferris Wheel On Fire* and *Everything Is* EPs – and the seven-inch of Balkan folk tune *Little Birds*, Mangum's last-known recording – that will fascinate deep divers. *Everything Is* collects juvenilia that finds Mangum playing around with retro psychedelia, shoegaze and blasted Velvets distortion, while early-track compilation *Ferris Wheel* displays a cleaner formative band, with snippets of *Aeroplane* already swirling in the mix.

Late check-in essential.

Mark Beaumont

Various

Young Limbs Rise Again: The Story Of The Batcave Nightclub 1982-1985

CHERRY RED

The birth of the 'too cool for school'.

The Batcave was a club in early-80s London that can lay claim to being the first goth club in Britain; certainly it was a major hangout for goths and goth-adjacent music fans. It was founded by members of the band Specimen and was the subject of *Young Limbs And Numb Hymns*, a slightly peculiar compilation album including acts as diverse as Specimen, Test Department, Patti Palladin and James T. Pursey.

Forty years on, that *Young Limbs* compilation has been remade and expanded to five CDs of music from the Batcave. And it's a magnificent document of a murky, grey-green time when New Romantics and post-punks sat next to positive punks and electro-pop acts quite happily, when DJs moved from Soft Cell and the Human League to X Mal Deutschland and Malaria. Sadly the infamously horrible *Sewer Baby* spoken-word album is not represented, but everything else is, from famous bands like Joy Division and The Cure to hip goths like the Birthday Party and the Banshees, via Vicious Pink and Adam And The Ants. *Young Limbs* features lost names such as Let's Wreck Mother and Zero LeCreche as well as the more expected Alien Sex Fiend, Gene Loves Jezebel and Danse Society. Throw in a full-on glam CD and you have a superb document of a very fluid era and a scene that wasn't yet a scene.

David Quantick

The Strokes

The Singles Volume 1 LEGACY RECORDINGS

Historic singles collection from modern indie rock's Big Bang.

PG BRUNELLI/ICONICPIX

The initial run of singles from New York's down-at-heel brat pack The Strokes is arguably among the greatest since The Beatles', and in its own sphere had just as huge an impact. Landing in an over-produced and lacklustre 2000 alternative scene virtually indistinguishable from the mainstream, no-fi jives like *The Modern Age* and *Last Nite* – revisiting the raw NYC sonics of early Television and the new-wave vivacity of Blondie with a millennial insouciance – sounded like hook-line dirty bombs bursting from an East Village basement, levelling the landscape. Within months, a new generation of 21st-century alt. rock culture was formed in their sharp image and at their compulsive pace.

This box set of the 10 seven-inch singles released from their first three albums – 2001's *Is This It* to 2006's *First Impressions Of Earth* – is as much historical document as a clutch of magnificent pop moments then, and also testament to the way success inevitably lures bands from the undergrowth. It begins with Rough Trade's rougher-at-the-edges versions of *The Modern Age* and *Last Nite*, where the lack of fidelity makes up a good 60 per cent of the rebel-pop appeal, and covers the highlights of their captivating debut – the locomotive *Hard To Explain*, gutter-crawling epic *New York City Cops* and the gorgeous *Someday*, the sound of sunshine underground. Then *12:51* ushers in the slicker era of 2003's *Room On Fire* with its hand claps, synth-pop hooks and superlative yet underplayed songwriting, extending to *Reptilia* and *The End Has No End*. Finally, they go full-rock on *First Impressions* singles *Juicebox* and *Heart In A Cage*, consumed by commercial concerns within five years but maintaining melodic velocity all the way.

Besides an oddball funk collaboration with Josh Homme and Eddie Vedder on *Mercy Mercy Me*, the B-sides provide worthy footnotes. Wonky home demos of *Alone, Together* and *Is This It* charm with their drum machines and bedroom restraints. A feedback heavy cover of The Clash's *Clampdown* from 2003 is a taste of how powerful a live force The Strokes could be. *You Only Live Once* is charted from *Taxi*-theme keyboard demo to finished alt.pop hula, and *Modern Girls & Old Fashioned Men* is a lost classic.

A box set without a single wasted note.

Mark Beaumont

Genesis

BBC Broadcasts *UMR/EMI*

Five-CD or three-LP live radio rarities set shows the band's complex evolution.

During a touching 1972 rendition of *The Musical Box*, the song in which a girl decapitates a boy with a croquet mallet, only for him to be resurrected for a short time during which he begs for sexual intercourse until his nurse kills him (again), Genesis, moving fluidly from restraint to explosions, play with the confidence of a veteran band, although they'd just entered their twenties.

What's gratifying about this sumptuous set, a heartening addition to the group's legacy, is how it honours and respects those early years as they sought identity, tangled up in vaguely kinky fables and fairy tales, and laid slabs of different genres side by side; late-career anthologies (and farewell tours) have tended to favour their subsequent stadium-appeasing, route-one music. *BBC Broadcasts*, curated by keyboard player Tony Banks, redresses the balance.

In the context of this sweeping collection of intimate BBC sessions and massive live shows, loads of it previously unreleased on vinyl, the earlier stuff is far more intriguing because much of it is relatively unfamiliar; the 1987 Wembley Stadium show was out on DVD, and other treasures (such as *Twilight Alehouse*) have popped up on archives. So any buzz or thrill here comes with the '78 Knebworth tracks, the 1980 Lyceum show and the formative John Peel/*Night Ride* sessions.

The underexposed, sub-three-minute nugget *Harlequin* ('72 Peel session) quivers with beauty, the harmonies cherubic.

Between those much-debated 'earlier' and 'later' poles there exists, logically enough, Genesis's 'middle' period. While its neighbours have duked it out for decades, there's a growing sense that in fact this might be their happiest, most productive phase of all. The stirring Lyceum show focuses on that era when Collins had acclimatised to taking over the mic from Gabriel and they'd found the sweet spot marrying prog and pop. Their creative odyssey from *A Trick Of The Tail* through to *Duke* sees a band making gently exploratory music without straining. They're comfortable, in the right ways. The splendour of *One For The Vine* or *Burning Rope* here melts your resistance, and this section of this collection constitutes their finest live recording outside 1977's *Seconds Out*, no less.

So while the sheer scale of 80s Wembley and 90s Knebworth necessitates compromises, it's the nooks and crannies, trips and treats of their getting there, discovering themselves, that make this assemblage a must for dedicated followers of anti-fashion. At their best, Genesis sounded like anything but reality.

Chris Roberts

Dokken

The Elektra Albums 1983-1987 *BMG*

Don and George's heavy metal fight club.

Despite them being one of the defining multi-million-selling American metal bands of the 80s, Dokken's career is almost always cast in the light of the openly hostile relationship between vocalist Don Dokken and ace guitarist George Lynch. Infighting aside, however, the quality of the music cannot be denied – witness this limited-edition box set of newly remastered versions of the band's first four albums for Elektra, although sadly there are no bonus tracks.

The promising *Breaking The Chains* ('83) features some early classics in *I Can't See You* and *Seven Thunders*, but 1984's *Tooth And Nail* is where things get really interesting; 'difficult second album' doesn't even come close to describing the production problems created by Don and George's endless enmity. Nevertheless there's plenty of ace tuneage to be enjoyed, not least *When Heaven Comes Down* and *Turn On The Action*. Better still is 1985's *Under Lock And Key*, which boasts some truly blazing tracks in *Unchain The Night*, *Lightning Strikes Again* and *Til' The Livin' End*, and the muscular *Back For The Attack* ('87) marks the end of the band's classic 80s era – before their 1989 demise – with some of their best songs: *Heaven Sent*, *Burning Like A Flame* and *Dream Warriors*.

Essi Berelian

Gary Numan

Reissues *EARMUSIC*

Turn-of-the-century ultra-dark brooding, reissued.

Darker than Depeche Mode, twitchier than Trent Reznor, Gary Numan's 2000 album *Pure* (**7/10**) polarised reviewers with its menacing, often whispered vocals, sinister strings and uncompromising, shrill blasts of industrial-metal guitar. To ice the cake, his lyrics railed at religious dogma and made no bones about discussing rape, murder, miscarriage and IVF.

Twenty-three years on, the abrasive angst of this collaboration with the Sulphur production duo may translate to a broader audience than the diehard Numanoids who were, at that time, the only people listening. (Although, freakishly, the spooky single *Rip* was his first Top 30 hit since a 1988 team-up with the bloke from Shakatak). The best track, *A Prayer For The Unborn*, remains a mood-establishing live favourite.

Scarred – Live At Brixton Academy (**8/10**) shows those live chops limbering up through a propulsive 2002 Brixton show which mixed the *Pure* material with indelible Numan nerve-manglers like *This Wreckage* and the deliciously doomy *Down In The Park*. Of course *Cars* and *Are "Friends" Electric?* are there, but the confidence on display hints that the wilderness years may just be giving way to an era of successful reinvention. It took a while longer, but he got there. These albums were bruising, brave bricks in that wall.

Chris Roberts

10cc

Reissues *PROPER*

Vinyl reissue series opens with the changing-personnel phase.

A welcome (although not chronological) flurry of 10cc reissues begins with the last from the foursome of Eric Stewart, Graham Gouldman, Kevin Godley and Lol Creme and the first where the abiding pair strived to prove they could still cut it. Both albums burst with brilliance, exemplars of how art-rock can blend the cerebral and emotional. Okay, there are some fillers (*Head Room*, *You've Got A Cold*), but they're the price you pay for maverick test flights.

How Dare You! from '76 (**9/10**) is their masterpiece (fight me, *The Original Soundtrack* fans), and where the group bounced ideas around most ingeniously. *I'm Mandy Fly Me* soars, and subversive ballads *Don't Hang Up* and *Lazy Ways* are as inventive as they are intimate.

On 1977's *Deceptive Bends* (**9/10**), Stewart and Gouldman were driven to show they weren't just 5cc, and with the lush *People In Love* nailed the yearning. But could they pull off the magnum opus? *Feel The Benefit* answered that, its 11-minutes-plus of tripartite neo-prog culminating with a Stewart guitar solo that should be in any conversation about the greatest of all time. He could sing like a charm too.

© BBC

It's fitting that Hipgnosis peaked with their artwork for these tours de force.
Chris Roberts

Bernie Marsden
Big Boy Blues & Green
PURPLE

Whitesnake guitarist rekindles his first love: blues.

He'll always be defined by his four-year stint in Whitesnake, but Bernie Marsden might just be the great British blues guitarist of his generation. His solo career has been solid but unspectacular, but this four-CD collection makes a fair case for reappraisal.

It takes in *Green & Blues*, 1995's tribute to Peter Green, 2003's *Big Boy Blue*, and a February 2003 concert from The Granary, Buckingham that features a brass-drenched stomp through *Knock On Wood* and ends with Whitesnake's *Here I Go Again*, Marsden's pension plan reworked as an acoustic strum with jazz singer Sharon Watson working wonders on backing vocals. In the sleeve-notes, Marsden is keen to point out that his Green tribute preceded Gary Moore's *Blues For Greeny*, but its harsh production doesn't capture the magic as Moore did.

Big Boy Blue is much more rewarding. Marsden's own *Working For The C.S.A.* and his lovelorn ballad *Place In My Heart* benefit from a lightness of touch, but when he gets earthier on a harmonica-led version of Sonny Boy Williamson's *Do It If You Wanna* there's real fire. A bonus disc (also released with the original *Big Boy Blue*) reworks some album tracks and adds a languid stroll through Big Joe Turner's *Someday After*.

John Aizlewood

Big Country
Reissues PROPER/UMC

Influential folk-rock pioneers afforded vinyl editions.

During their formative years in the early-to-mid-80s, it wasn't unusual for Big Country, U2, and Simple Minds all to be mentioned in the same breath. One of music journalism's less convincing attempts at taxonomy, 'big music' had the common thread of producer Steve Lillywhite, who specialised in a stadium-ready sound – notably on Big Country's *The Crossing*, U2's *War* and Simple Minds' *Sparkle In The Rain*. But Big Country's swirling bagpipe sustain set them apart from their Celtic-rock brethren.

That sound would eventually become as much of a millstone as a USP. But their confident and assured debut *The Crossing* (**8/10**) was as much about the impressive rhythm section, especially the technical brilliance of underrated drummer Mark Brzezicki, notably on Top 10 hit *Fields Of Fire*, the self-titled single and *Chance*. Rewarding deep cuts, from the haunting *The Storm* to the poignant *Lost Patrol* and the progressive *Porrohman*, proved an assured musicianship craft among guitarist/vocalist Stuart Adamson, guitarist Bruce Watson, bassist Tony Butler and Brzezicki. Ambitiously expansive in scope, second album *Steeltown*'s (**7/10**) failure to match the commercial success of *The Crossing* belies its rapid ascent of songwriting maturity in composition and arrangements – a lasting influence on alt.rock bands such as Manic Street Preachers and The Cranberries.
Alex Burrows

The Auteurs
People Round Here Don't Like To Talk About It – The Complete EMI Recordings CHERRY RED

Bah humbug!

Although he was roped in with the fairly risible Britpop clan, Auteurs bandleader Luke Haines was inclined to be impertinent rather than pertinent, delivering kitchen-sink lyrics that stayed in the gutter when others gazed skyward. *Starstruck*, from the ironically named debut *New Wave*, gives Suede a run for their money, while the overall sound of the music was, some said, "bedsit bohemia".

This six-CD box collects The Auteurs' four albums and adds a host of B-sides, rarities – including Steve Albini's early demo of *Everything You Say* – and Haines's side foray into his Baader-Meinhof project where he threw up such unpleasantries as *There's Gonna Be An Accident*. A sickly obsession with prime-time TV schlock (*The Rubettes*) and English sub-culture (*How I Learned To Love The Bootboys*) stuck in a steel toecap, but Auteurs had melodies to spare, mixing Kinksy guitar pop with techno menace and feral lyrics.

Like the equally malevolent Microdisney, they didn't court mass acceptance, a habit that keeps this lot sounding contemporary. *After Murder Park* (1996) is gruesomely pretty, or vice versa, and provides the box title from the opening line to *Unsolved Child Murder*.

Plenty here to keep out the chill while you watch your smart meter melt your wallet.

Max Bell

Trapeze
Don't Stop The Music PURPLE

Boys keep swingin'.

Classic Rock album reviews are in danger of doubling up as obituaries these days. In the case of Midlands rockers Trapeze, two of the band's three core members are no longer with us: guitarist Mel Galley, later of Whitesnake, died in 2008, while disgraced future Judas Priest drummer Dave Holland passed in 2018. That leaves bassist/vocalist Glenn Hughes as the last man strutting (currently with the faintly ludicrous Dead Daisies).

Trapeze were discovered in the late 60s by the Moody Blues, who signed them to their Threshold label. A self-titled debut showed no hint of the slinky-hipped funk-o-beast the band would become; it sounds like a mutant Moodies, bizarre tracks such as *The Giant's Dead Hoorah!* and *Medley: Fairytale/Verily Verily/Fairytale* finding little favour with the fledgling prog community. Thankfully, second album *Medusa* showed a marked improvement. The prog elements were scaled back and Hughes began showboating like a fleet of oligarch yachts (viz. opening track *Black Cloud*).

Trapeze inexplicably became Big In Texas, and third album *You Are The Music… We're Just The Band* is their love letter to the Lone Star State. It's a glorious, celebratory record full of Eastman Color 70s sunshine. *Coast To Coast*, *Way Back To The Bone* and the title track transport the listener back to a time of wide-eyed rock'n'roll wonder.

Rounded off by three discs of live tracks (including a poignant Hughes-Galley-Holland '92 reunion), *Don't Stop The Music* is, to quote Norman Vaughan, a swingin' collection.

Geoff Barton

BEST OF THE REST
Other reissues out this month.

Uriah Heep
Reissues BMG
Reissued as picture discs, *Sweet Freedom* ('73) and *Return To Fantasy* ('75) – despite bookending 1974's middling *Wonderworld* – both capture Heep line-ups (the first with bassist Gary Thain, the second with John Wetton) in fine form, but *Sweet Freedom* has the edge. Both **7/10**

John Lee Hooker
Burnin' CONCORD
Mississippi's King Of The Boogie alongside Motown's legendary session players the Funk Brothers in the Detroit of '61. *Boom Boom* is the timeless hit, but the rolling lilt of *Lost A Good Girl* is easily worth the price of 180-gram LP or stereo/mono two-CD admission. **7/10**

The Barracudas
Drop Out With The Barracudas LEMON
A cult combination of 60s garage-punk and folk-tinged languid surf-psych, The Barracudas aspired to a jangling Byrdsian authenticity fatally out of step with their post-punk/pre-indie times. Seventy-five tracks document their legend/accentuate their shortcomings. **5/10**

Rolling Stones
GRRR Live! MERCURY STUDIOS
This 'Definitive Live Best Of' captures the Stones in Newark on vintage form during their 50th-anniversary tour of 2012 up to their necks in guests: Springsteen, Black Keys, John Mayer, Gary Clark Jr, and Lady Gaga who properly puts her back into *Gimme Shelter*. **8/10**

The Thrills
Let's Bottle Bohemia PROPER
A vinyl reissue for the Dublin quintet's second album (augmented by guest appearances from R.E.M.'s Peter Buck and Van Dyke Parks) that, quite rightly, garnered significant chart action on its '04 release. Scintillating California-styled sunshine pop-rock never gets old. **7/10**

Various
Teenage Glampage: Can The Glam 2 7T'S
Four more CDs of glam detritus to accentuate just how many Tin Pan Alley bandwagon jumpers proliferated (only to sink without trace) in the wake of Bolanmania and how easy they were to spot. Here we find the sublime (Marc, Mott) awash in the faintly ridiculous. **5/10**

Arrows
The Complete Collection 7T'S
Combining their sole album *First Hit* (only hit, more like) with a CD of singles, this neat set finds an Anglo-US trio squired/smothered by RAK's Most/Chinn/Chapman A-team who gifted them *Touch Too Much*, while overlooking band original *I Love Rock 'N' Roll*. **6/10**

Frank Zappa
Zappa '80: Mudd Club/Munich ZAPPA/UME
Capturing two full *Sheik Yerbouti*/*Joe's Garage*-focused shows by FZ's rarely heard dual-vocalist sextet (formative in NYC, a more accomplished double-length German show). Zappa's guitar's fluid and frontal, the collective chops exemplary. Chemistry? Not so much. **6/10**

Various
Deviation Street: High Times In Ladbroke Grove 1967-1975 GRAPEFRUIT
Three-CD compilation documenting the much-overlooked West London Underground scene that chiefly revolved around Mick Farren's Deviants and Hawkwind. Fascinating proto-prog/space-rock/metal and a must-hear embryonic Roxy Music demo. **8/10**

The Ruts
The Crack PROPER
No other punk album comes with quite so nagging a 'What if?' as *The Crack*. Until the death of charismatic vocalist Malcolm Owen, The Ruts were second-generation UK punk's leading lights, and this (freshly re-vinyled) incandescent debut is their masterpiece. **8/10**

Ash
Nu-Clear Sounds BMG
Ash's newly splatter and clear-vinyled second may well be characterised as highlighting their darker side, but it's still as melodic as a basket of kittens. Even when thrashing the grunge Tim Wheeler simply can't help delivering hits (*Wild Surf*, *Numbskull*). Genius. **8/10**

BEST OF THE REST REVIEWS BY IAN FORTNAM

THE HARD STUFF

STUFF

BOOKS & DVDs

Alice Cooper @ 75

Gary Graff MOTORBOOKS/QUARTO

Fan-friendly compendium of all things Alice.

For some of us, Alice Cooper, no matter how many times he removes his metaphorical mask to reveal the relaxed and detached showman that he undoubtedly is, will retain an intrinsic mystique, an unmistakable aura of clear and present danger. On arrival into our lives, back in the 70s, Alice was in his mid-twenties, at the peak of his powers as both an artist and as a widely condemned example of what we as adolescents should never aspire to be. Irresistible, in other words. Catnip for an impressionable generation weaned on an ever-more permissive society who, five short years later, would cough up punk rock like a particularly noisome fur ball. And this – despite the fact that we really should have grown up in the intervening half-century – is how we'll always prefer to remember him: noxious, drunk, wielding an axe, engaging in necrophilia and chasing a giant tooth.

Alice and his music, especially his evergreen magnum opus *School's Out*, delivers us straight back to that last day of term, to rose-tinted salad days of Chopper bikes and Chopper Harris, when we were all, for want of a better expression, lout and proud. Which is why *Alice Cooper @ 75* works so well. It's neither leather-bound, sophisticated, nor an academic work to be pored over, as a reader of your age and experience is probably supposed to (refreshed only by a crystal-glassed single malt and a thoughtfully sucked pipe), it's the sort of publication you'd have lapped up in the Cooper heyday (over Strawberry Cresta and KP Skips). A colourful compendium of garish images and short, sharp, easily digestible snippets of red-top tabloid-y titbits, blurted across page after shiny page of Alice, Alice and yet more Alice. It's like the bloated bastard offspring of one of those fold-out poster mags that widely proliferated across glam-age bedroom walls and the *Music Scene Annual 1974*. And who wouldn't want that?

Published ostensibly to celebrate Alice's 75th birthday, it's handily split into 75 separate, chronological sections, beautifully illustrated with iconic images, countless items of memorabilia to entrance even the most devoted fan, plus two posters and a print. It comes in a box (of course it does) with an image of Alice highlighted in black velvet like a mortician's flock wallpaper, and despite the fact that it's 60 quid (i.e. too much), you will buy it. You won't be able to help yourself, because somewhere inside there's a 12-year old you who'll never forgive you if you don't.

Ian Fortnam

Nik Turner

Space Ritual: 1994

WEINERWORLD

Spaced warrior at his most musically – and visually – fuzzy.

Part of Hawkwind, leader of Inner City Unit and the brains behind assorted solo projects, Nik Turner, who died in November, was a genuine maverick. *Space Ritual: 1994* (nothing to do with Hawkwind's live album *Space Ritual* or Turner's actual Space Ritual band, which he formed in 2000) is probably not the legacy he'd have wanted.

A full-band concert at San Francisco's Great American Music Hall in 1994, it's a gleeful, King Gizzard-influencing psychedelic swirl, with a crack band, punctuated by Turner's flute and saxophone. Hawkwind's *The Right Stuff* sizzles and *You Shouldn't Do That* is almost literally hypnotic. Alas, the visual quality is so wretched it could be Tina Turner up there. A partly spoken, heavily edited *Silver Machine* is tossed off underneath the end credits, and Genesis P.Orridge's spoken-word turn on *Armour For Everyday* does neither party any favours. Don't remember either of them this way.

John Aizlewood

Carole King

Home Again: Live from Central Park CODA COLLECTION

The birth of a musical legend, witnessed by thousands and, fortunately, caught on camera.

Carole King's revered legacy began with the release of *Tapestry*, her second album, in 1971. Two years later, the first ever free concert in New York's Central Park took place, at which King played to 100,000 people.

Archive footage presents a stripped-back first set with the aim of recreating the intimacy of *Tapestry*, demonstrating King's natural ease in front of an audience. She is then joined by her band – the cream of the 70s West Coast crop – for songs from her then-upcoming album *Fantasy* (1973). David T Walker's flawless guitar tone embroiders *Being At War With Each Other* and *Haywood*, while Bobbye Hall's percussion ignites a medley of *Corazón* and *Believe In Humanity*.

This DVD marks King's evolution from Brill Building songwriter into an era-defining artist. Closing footage captures her being whisked away from the stage, perhaps, at that point, with only an inkling of the epic longevity of her art.

Phoebe Flys

Tears For Fears – On Track: Every Album, Every Song

Paul Clark SONICBOND

Analysis of art-pop duo digs through catalogue.

With 2022's *The Tipping Point*, their first album in 18 years, Roland Orzabal and Curt Smith came back strong, proving that their songs have few peers for gear changes. Whether epic or intimate, their music knows which triggers to twitch, and the young synth-pop duo of the 80s are now a multifaceted pop behemoth.

Paul Clark's track-by-track study offers a narrative of their career, its pauses and peaks, and the pair's splits and reunions. It's focused, however, on zooming in on each album and song, tracing TFF from their early forays as Graduate, through their breakthrough hits and on to the spellbinding fusions of melody and neo-prog that constitute the likes of *Songs From The Big Chair*. It doesn't patronise the Orzabal 'solo' albums that came out under the TFF name; *Elemental* is underrated as a rule, but granted due respect here.

A solid tribute to an illustrious body of work.

Chris Roberts

Guitar: The Shape Of Sound (100 Iconic Designs)

Ultan Guilfoyle PHAIDON

Handsome volume celebrating 300 years of the evolution of the modern-rock instrument.

As writer Ultan Guilfoyle reminds us, the Van Halens and Pages of today owe their career to early humanoids who discovered how to get a string to make noise by vibrating it over a semi-enclosed chamber. The author then takes us on a brief but illuminating history of the guitar's developments; including Stradivarius's rare guitars, the futuristic 'resophonic' guitars of the early 1930s and classics such as the Fender Stratocaster and the Gibson Les Paul.

The book's 100 designs are

supplemented with wonderful images, which avoid obvious rock clichés: an overcoated Sister Rosetta Tharpe wielding her Gibson SG in 1964, or Woody Guthrie and his "This machine kills fascists" guitar sticker. Guilfoyle finds reason for hope for the guitar's future, in players like Finneas, brother of Billie Eilish, and contemporary designs such as the quite beautiful Schorr guitars, crying out for a new generation of innovators.

David Stubbs

Lou Reed

The Art Of The Straight Line: My Tai-Chi FABER

Should have written that novel.

In the words of photographer Mick Rock (just one of many interviewees whose insights and recollections provide the editorial meat for what is ostensibly an after-the-fact compilation of Lou Reed's hitherto unpublished writings on Tai Chi), Lou was possessed of an "infinite curiosity". Here was a man who'd regularly become obsessed with the outer and inner workings of guitars, hi-fi, spectacles, photography, diet, you name it, and the internal Chinese martial art of Tai Chi stood as one of his more resilient passions.

Lou's widow Laurie Anderson, leading a team of four editors, has done her best with scant source material, and while there are enough peripheral nuggets to delight Reed devotees (welcome contributions from Iggy Pop, Tony Visconti, Jonathan Richman and more), other Tai Chi manuals are available.

Ian Fortnam

Punk Rock Vegan Movie

Dir: Moby

A unique perspective on the history of punk and animal rights, from the guy who wrote *Porcelain*.

"If you make pretty Enya music, why make a movie about angry punk music?" is a fair question of Moby's directorial debut, even if it is asked by a talking dog. But, as long-time Moby fans may know, 1996's album *Animal Rights* pinned his colours to the mast as far as a love for both punk and animal rights go, and this movie presents an in-depth exploration of the intersection between the two.

Moby explores the history of punk and hardcore through the lens of activism, with regular surrealist asides to help re-frame the narrative and set up new threads (thus the talking dog). Along the way he is assisted by an impressive and diverse cast ranging from punk legends Steve Ignorant and Captain Sensible to Rob Zombie, and Derrick Green and Celeste Bell-Dos Santos (daughter of X-Ray Spex frontwoman Poly Styrene), introduced in an absurdly long roll-call that feels almost like a Mel Brooks satire but highlights just how much work has gone into the project.

Inevitably, *Punk Rock Vegan Movie* skews more towards the importance of animal rights as it gets further in, and the music takes a background seat. But, crucially, Moby ensures the film doesn't become overly preachy (although it certainly packs some stomach-turning imagery), instead presenting a more thorough snapshot of punk's ethos beyond the usual cocktail of nihilism and destruction.

Rich Hobson

Holly Knight

I Am The Warrior: My Crazy Life Writing The Hits And Rocking The MTV Eighties PERMUTED PRESS

Simply the blandest.

Songwriters, eh?! They write the songs the whole world sings, but when it comes to spilling the beans the Heinz cans stay well and truly sealed.

Holly Knight – famed for writing *The Best* for Tina Turner, amid myriad other hits – grew up in the hedonistic hotbed of the 70s Noo Yawk rock scene. Yet she might as well have been knitting jumpers in a jolly Enid Blyton scenario. Knight slept with Kiss's Ace Frehley and Gene Simmons, while simultaneously steppin' with her boyfriend, drummer Anton Fig. Holy shit, tell us more! Erm… "Ace's apartment was surprisingly tidy"; "We ended up in his [Gene's] giant bed. It was fairly lacking for me and I'm sure for him too." What, the giant bed wasn't giant enough? Is that it?! Give us strength. Okay, we're being facetious here. But the overwhelming feeling is that Knight has left her best stories untold. Although it is interesting to read, in these economically challenging times, that "stretch limos make me sick".

Geoff Barton

Queensrÿche '88: (l-r) Scott Rockenfield, Michael Wilton, Geoff Tate, Chris DeGarmo, Eddie Jackson.

Queensrÿche

They were pioneers of progressive metal with a trio of great albums, and even after a bitter split made some excellent music.

If ever there was a moment when a great band turned into a farce, it was when two different versions of Queensrÿche were battling it out in 2013.

In one corner were three members of the band's classic line-up with new singer Todd La Torre, who sounded like original singer Geoff Tate, and an album simply and pointedly titled *Queensrÿche*. In the other corner was Tate with a huge cast of musicians, including former members of AC/DC, Judas Priest and Whitesnake, and an album with a title that was not so much pointed as downright inflammatory: *Frequency Unknown*, or F.U. for short.

Tate pleaded innocence. "People read so much into everything," he said. But few people were buying that – least of all his former bandmates.

Inevitably, this battle was resolved in a court of law. Tate lost the right to use the Queensrÿche name, but was permitted to use the title of the band's classic album from 1988, *Operation: Mindcrime*, for the name of a new group.

Of late, a truce of sorts has been reached between the two parties. And no matter how much shit they've thrown at each other in the past, one simple truth remains: Queensrÿche's best music was made when the five founding members were together: Tate, guitarists Chris DeGarmo and Michael Wilton, bassist Eddie Jackson and drummer Scott Rockenfield.

The band formed in 1982 in Bellevue, a suburb of Seattle. Previously, Tate had been fronting a progressive rock group named Myth. The other four had a band called The Mob, but no singer. They persuaded Tate to sing on a demo tape, and soon after he quit Myth and joined the newly christened Queensrÿche.

In the early days they played classically styled heavy metal, with Tate's high-register voice and the twin guitars recalling Judas Priest and Iron Maiden. But with three brilliant albums released between '86 and '90 – *Rage For Order, Operation: Mindcrime* and *Empire* – Queensrÿche blazed a trail as pioneers of progressive metal.

With cruel irony, it was the alternative rock music that came out of Seattle in the early 90s that drove Queensrÿche into the margins, as it did for so many of their peers. But the band has survived through all the lean years, and despite the losses of key figures in Tate and DeGarmo. And as their powerful 2022 album *Digital Noise Alliance* proves, this story isn't finished yet.

Paul Elliott

Essential Classics

Operation: Mindcrime

EMI MANHATTAN, 1988

Queensrÿche's masterpiece is one of the greatest metal albums of all time. Moreover, it's one of the finest concept albums in any genre. And its storyline is as relevant now, in an era where conspiracy theories run rife, as it was in 1988: a tightly-wound thriller involving revolutionary politics, state corruption, brainwashing, religion, drug addiction, sex and murder.

The drama plays out in a series of brilliant songs, including three monumental anthems: *Breaking The Silence, I Don't Believe In Love* and *Eyes Of A Stranger*. And with third album, their magnum opus, Queensrÿche also had their first million seller.

Rage For Order

EMI, 1986

In the photos for this second album, with their big hair, make-up and fancy clothes, Queensrÿche looked like Sunset Strip poseurs. But that's where the similarities to Poison ended.

Rage For Order was a huge leap forward from debut album *The Warning*, with greater complexity and sophistication in the heavy songs, and an art-rock sensibility in dark mood pieces such as *Neue Regel* and *Gonna Get Close To You*, the latter written by female cult artist Dalbello. And two tracks on the record are among the very best the band have ever recorded: *Walk In The Shadows* for its power, and *The Killing Words* for its emotional depth.

GEORGE CHIN/ICONICPIX

Superior Reputation cementing

Queensrÿche

EMI, 1983

When in 1982 *Kerrang!* hailed Queensrÿche "the future of heavy metal", it was on the strength of just a four-track demo tape, which was then pressed as EP on indie label 206 Records, before being reissued in 1983 as the band's first worldwide release.

Twenty years later, a CD version was expanded with 10 tracks recorded live in Japan in 1984. But all the magic is in those four studio cuts from '82, and primarily in the signature song *Queen Of The Reich*, an explosion of heavy metal thunder as earth-shaking as anything from Judas Priest's 1982 classic *Screaming For Vengeance*.

The Warning

EMI, 1984

As first albums go, *The Warning* was a powerful statement of intent. While not a classic debut, it's a confident, dynamic album from a young band full of drive and ambition.

Their influences were still writ large in songs such as *En Force* and *Deliverance*, with two-guitar harmony riffs à la Iron Maiden, and high-pitched, dog-bothering wails straight out of the Rob Halford playbook. But there was originality in the album's most left-field track, *NM15, which was* rhythmically and vocally unorthodox. There was also high drama, in its two mighty anthems: *Take Hold Of The Flame* and *Roads To Madness.*

Empire

EMI, 1990

After the intensity of *Operation: Mindcrime*, the follow-up was more direct, with a slicker, radio-friendly sound. The result was Queensrÿche's biggest selling album, which went triple-platinum in America.

Not that they dumbed it down on *Empire*. On the contrary, *Silent Lucidity*, while essentially a power ballad, had echoes of Pink Floyd in its rich atmospherics and highbrow lyrics. And while *Jet City Woman*, with its big chorus, was aimed at a mainstream audience, the album's depth and weight was further illustrated in the sadness of *Della Brown* and in the existentialist epic *Anybody Listening?.*

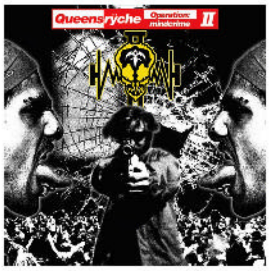
Promised Land

EMI, 1994

In the four years between *Empire* and *Promised Land*, so much had changed in the musical landscape. With grunge dominant, and bands such as Pantera and Korn redefining metal, Queensrÿche were no longer trailblazers of heavy music.

But they still had a solid fan base, which helped *Promised Land* debut at No.3 on the US chart. And on an album that eventually sold a million copies, the quality runs deep: *I Am I* has a whiff of *Kashmir*; *Bridge* is a beautiful acoustic-based song, a logical extension of *Silent Lucidity*; and the monolithic title track is one of the heaviest things they ever recorded.

Good Worth exploring



Operation: Mindcrime II

RHINO, 2006

The sequel to Queensrÿche's greatest album could never match the original. Nor was this album truly a band project, instead one controlled by singer Geoff Tate and guitarist Mike Stone, with minimal input from other band members.

But credit to Tate. *Mindcrime II* is an impressive piece of work, with another dark and twisting plot-line built around the characters from the first story, and heavy dramatic tension in songs such *I'm American, If I Could Change It All, A Junkie's Blues* and *Fear City Slide*. There's even a cameo from Ronnie James Dio, hamming it up as the sinister Dr. X.

Condition Human

CENTURY MEDIA, 2015

Queensrÿche (2013), the band's first album with Todd La Torre, walked all over *Frequency Unknown*, the album by Geoff Tate's rival operation. In that sense, a small victory. But it was with *Condition Human* that the La Torre-led 'Rÿche really came into their own.

The album's triumphant opening track, *Arrow Of Time*, is simultaneously classic Queensrÿche and more Iron Maiden than Iron Maiden. A high energy level is maintained in sharply focused tracks such as *Hellfire, Toxic Remedy* and *Eye9*. And with La Torre singing like Tate at his peak, this was the band's best album in 20 years.

Digital Noise Alliance

CENTURY MEDIA, 2022

Classic Rock's review of *Digital Noise Alliance* began with a hard truth: "Queensrÿche are a long way from metal's cutting edge in 2022." But in fairness, the same could be said of Metallica, Iron Maiden and pretty much any other metal band of a certain vintage.

But while there might not be anything groundbreaking on *Digital Noise Alliance*, there is genuine depth in the material – electrifying power in *Behind The Walls* and *In Extremis*, and beauty in *Forest*, another song with a similar feel to *Silent Lucidity*. The only bum note comes with the cover of Billy Idol's *Rebel Yell*, which nobody needed to hear.

Avoid

Dedicated To Chaos

ROADRUNNER, 2011

There are a few bad albums in the Queensrÿche catalogue, including the clunky, alternative-rock-influenced *Hear In The Now Frontier*, and the dreary covers album *Take Cover*. But the worst, by some distance, is *Dedicated To Chaos*, the last album that Geoff Tate made with other original members of the band.

It was a bold attempt to try something new by incorporating all manner of different sounds, from sitar to sampled beats. But no amount of experimentation could compensate for the lack of anything remotely resembling a decent song. And in the wake of this mess came an even messier break-up.

Essential Playlist

Queen Of The Reich
Queensrÿche

The Lady Wore Black
Queensrÿche

Take Hold Of The Flame
The Warning

Roads To Madness
The Warning

Walk In The Shadows
Rage For Order

The Killing Words
Rage For Order

Gonna Get Close To You
Rage For Order

I Don't Believe In Love
Operation: Mindcrime

Eyes Of A Stranger
Operation: Mindcrime

Breaking The Silence
Operation: Mindcrime

Silent Lucidity
Empire

Anybody Listening?
Empire

Della Brown
Empire

I Am I
Promised Land

Bridge
Promised Land

I'm American
Operation: Mindcrime II

Arrow Of Time
Condition Human

Forest
Digital Noise Alliance

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SUN 28th May - GLASGOW BLUES, RHYTHM & ROCK FESTIVAL
MON 29th May - GRIMSBY Yardbirds Rock Club
SAT 12th Aug - PENZANCE The Acorn

CHANTEL McGREGOR
ELLES BAILEY
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FRI 17TH MARCH - LEEDS BRUDENELL SOCIAL CLUB
THU 18TH MAY - NOTTINGHAM RESCUE ROOMS

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TUE 18TH APRIL – LONDON 100 CLUB

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THU 20TH APRIL – LONDON BUSH HALL

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SAT	06	MAY	LINCOLN BLUES RHYTHM & ROCK FESTIVAL
SUN	07	MAY	BILSTON ROBIN 2
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DESENSITISED
HALF MOON PANIC
Black Water Redemption
FIREKIND

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LIVE!

The High-Voltage What's On Guide

Edited By Ian Fortnam (Reviews) and Dave Ling (Tours)

P102

The Darkness

'Shitting out solid gold,' apparently. Their performance shines too.

P92 Interviews
P97 Tour Dates
P102 Live Reviews

SABRINA RAMDOYAL

> "[For the tour] I've picked some of the most difficult stuff to play. In terms of the proggy side, we're going to be badass."

Steve Hillage & Steve Davis

Hero meets hero: the snooker legend chats to the genre-hopping guitarist and producer he's supporting.

When The Utopia Strong – an experimental trio featuring none other than Steve Davis, six-times snooker World Champion – were announced as the special guests on an 11-date tour by the space-rock veteran and former Gong member-turned-unlikely dance music icon Steve Hillage, we couldn't resist inviting the prog-mad Davis to interview his hero (we also threw in a couple of questions of our own).

STEVE DAVIS: I have to keep pinching myself that this tour is happening. As a kid I bought many albums that you were involved with, and the names on the covers were these God-like entities. I never thought I would meet them, let alone do anything like this. But later, on a radio show, I did meet you, Steve, and [Gong founder] Daevid Allen, and it was a real pinch-me moment.

STEVE HILLAGE: Having watched a lot of snooker, particularly in the 1980s, I never imagined I would be joining you on tour, with you playing synth.

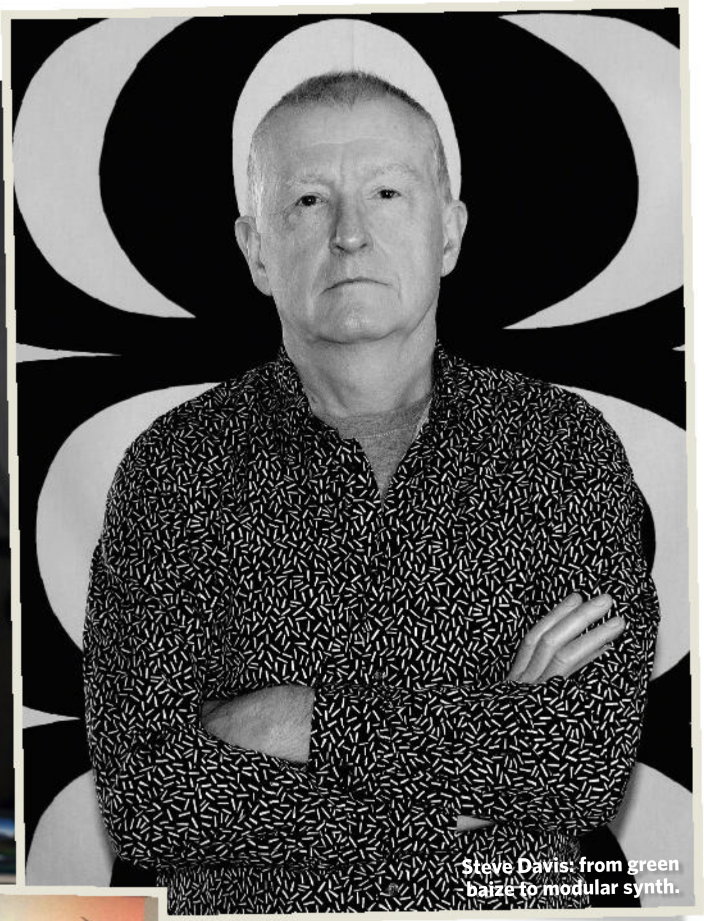
DAVIS: Getting down to business, how was lockdown for you?

HILLAGE: Actually, it was a catalyst for big change. Miquette [Giraudy, Hillage's musical and life partner, also a former member of Gong] and I had been realising we needed to downsize our living space in London, and just as everything shut down we were invited to spend lockdown in Glastonbury. So we escaped London in the middle of the night because we were not supposed to travel, and we set up in this Meditation Centre. It was so great, we moved to the area permanently.

DAVIS: Lockdown allowed people to examine where they were going in their careers. Did it happen for you – did you even think that touring might never start again?

HILLAGE: That thought was present – you know, maybe we've done it all. We had a tour booked and also some festivals, and everything got cancelled.

STEVE HILLAGE: OLLY CURTIS



Steve Davis: from green baize to modular synth.

Steve Hillage with Steve Davis and his Utopia Strong bandmate Kavus Torabi.

Everybody was rebooking for 2022, but I thought that was risky and we went with 2023. Now we're back. I'm happy that's so, because the gigs we did [in 2019] were so good that it left a hunger to do it again.

DAVIS: Have you ever had a moment where you thought: "I've had enough?"

HILLAGE: I had a major one at the end of 1979 when the Steve Hillage Band stopped touring. I was completely burnt out. I hadn't stopped touring since the first album from the band Khan [*Space Shanty*, 1972]. I had no clue what I wanted to do. Virgin Records wanted another rock album, and my heart wasn't in it. Which is how I ended up working as a record producer [Hillage worked with Simple Minds, It Bites, The Charlatans and more]. You know, poacher turns gamekeeper.

DAVIS: How did you get to making your own music again?

HILLAGE: *For To Next* and [sister album] *And Not Or* [both 1982] was a stepping stone to what happened next, but as far as playing live I wasn't sure I still wanted to do it until we met our new chum Alex Paterson [of ambient house music band The Orb].

DAVIS: What happened there?

HILLAGE: Alex invited us to a party at a warehouse in Battersea – this was Christmas of 1990. He wanted me to play some guitar. It turned out to be the first gig from [Hillage and Giraudy's next band] System 7 and also the first for The Orb. I thought: "I like this, let's do some more."

DAVIS: Were you accepted into that whole techno scene?

HILLAGE (enthusiastically): Yeah! People were inviting us to parties.

DAVIS: I love it when people reinvent themselves. Not jumping ship, but moving with the times.

HILLAGE: It was a logical progression that began in 1978 when we were touring my album *Green*. A DJ went on before us at a gig in Plymouth, he had an advance copy of *Man Machine* by Kraftwerk, and the audience was young and going crazy, dancing really enthusiastically. I found that amazing. I ran to the dressing room and said: "Miquette, come and look – people dancing to electronic music." Both of us realised this was going to be enormous.

DAVIS: I still talk about the 1985 [World Snooker Championship] final I played against Dennis Taylor, so I live in a world of nostalgia myself. I often find myself wondering why on earth I'm still talking about this one ball I missed almost forty years ago. You're about to go on a tour where you play your older music. How does that affect you?

HILLAGE: Well, that's the central question of this whole interview. During the 1990s we really felt we had to concentrate on System 7, but I was still getting offers to do rock things. Then in 1994 there was a twenty-fifth anniversary party for Gong, which I declined. But along with all of the surviving original members, I did agree to be a part of the Gong Family Unconvention [in Amsterdam] in 2006. I even played a short set of solo material and really loved it, so we started running the two [SHB and System 7] things in parallel. I even rejoined Gong for a while. When it came to the 2019 [solo] tour, I gingerly asked the members of Gong to be my band and they agreed. They're playing with me again on this tour, too.

CLASSIC ROCK: On this tour you're playing material from your solo albums *Fish Rising*, *L*, *Green* and *Motivation Radio*, plus a few surprises and some never-before-played live tracks. Are you comfortable with that?

HILLAGE: I don't really do nostalgia, I do what's buzzing me at the time, and I'm really looking forward to playing that music again. I'm still very proud of it. [Laughing] And I've picked some of the most difficult stuff to play. In terms of the proggy side, we're going to be badass.

DAVIS: My band [The Utopia Strong] will be winging it every night, improvising, because we never play the same set twice. How do you approach things when you play live?

HILLAGE: Well, for us, too, every show is different. Each night has its own special energy. You just go for a ride. If you don't get that feeling of nervous anticipation before a gig, maybe it's time to think about stopping. That's important because you're tuning into the zone. And right now I still get it.

CLASSIC ROCK: Steve D, you just mentioned reinvention, but your own leap from one form of entertainment to another is perhaps the most surprising of all. It's somewhat surreal to see you up there on stage, surrounded by the wires of your modular synth.

DAVIS (laughing): Well how do you think it feels for me! It's totally challenging, and I couldn't do it without those two great professionals [guitarist Kavus Torabi, also a member of Gong, and multi-instrumentalist and programmer Michael York of the band Coil], but I'm really loving the experience of it all. **DL**

Steve Hillage's Golden Vibe tour begins in Cambridge on March 21.

STEVE DAVIS: DAVID RYDER PRANGLEY/PRESS

Blackberry Smoke

Their 'We finally made it' UK tour is a belated but welcome return from the southern rockers.

After a familiar case of enforced tour cancellation, plus one of the group suffering a heart attack and more, the Atlanta-based band have finally made it to the UK. We caught up with frontman and guitarist Charlie Starr.

How is your drummer Brit Turner, who last August suffered a heart attack then two months later underwent surgery for brain cancer?
He's feeling good and going through chemo and we're all hoping and praying for the best. Right now Brit feels like playing, so he did the final handful of shows from last year, and he also sat in with me at a recent acoustic show I did with Benji Shanks [the band's touring guitarist].

Will Brit be well enough for this visit to Europe?
If the doctors give him the thumbs up, he'll be there.

UK dates were announced in the summer of 2021 and should have taken place back in February and March of 2022. You must be excited to finally play them.
Absolutely. When you look back at that period it's hard to believe. Our lockdown wasn't too bad, actually. We were really lucky that nobody got sick, we had a nice break and we made a record, *You Hear Georgia* [the group's seventh album]. After it came out, we started with socially distanced shows in empty venues and moved on to playing to people in their cars [laughs], but in 2021 we played a hundred and sixty shows. It was nuts.

So for Blackberry Smoke, things returned to normal a while ago?
It feels normal here in the US. But if you turn the news on they'll tell you it's not. I'm halfway joking there and halfway not. It feels good to be back out there playing shows. It has done for a year now..

How much of your latest album should we expect to hear on the tour?
We may play the whole thing. Over the course of all the shows we'll definitely play every song.

Read Southall Band, an up-and-coming band from Oklahoma who describe their music as "crunchy country", are the tour's special guests.
They're great. Last year we played a few shows with them in the US.

How is the follow-up to *You Hear Georgia* going?
It's finished. We mixed it yesterday. Dave Cobb produced it once again. I can't say how soon you'll hear it… maybe in the fall. Maybe even sooner. I love it. It's a rock'n'roll record, and you'll love it too.

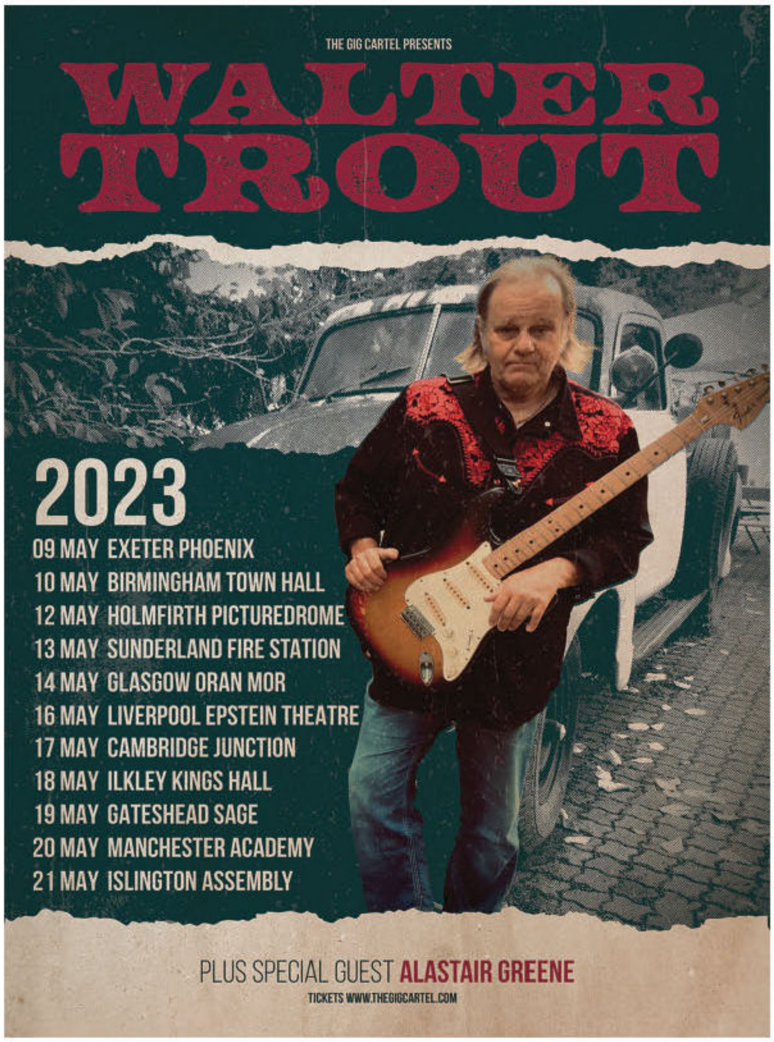
Tell us about the solo gigs you've been playing.
I love them because they're intimate and quiet. We play some small rooms, stripping back the songs from their bells and whistles and loud guitars to where they came from. Almost every Blackberry Smoke song was written that way [on an acoustic guitar]. I would love to try that in Europe.

It's lovely to hear that Blackberry Smoke have now raised nearly half a million dollars to benefit children's cancer research, diverting the cash from the band's meet-and-greets.
Brit's daughter Lana is a cancer survivor. Our fans were so giving towards Brit and his family that when she was all clear, the money they donated went into children's cancer research. This was around the time we started doing [paid] meet-and-greets. Brit asked us whether we could use the money [for that purpose] and everybody loved the idea.

Half a million dollars is a lot.
This all started a long time ago. We're not so wealthy that we can write a cheque of that size, but [the total amount] has built up from the fans. They know where the money is going when they purchase a meet-and-greet. **DL**

The tour runs from March 26 to April 2.

LIVE WIRE
THE AC/DC SHOW
10:03 BURY THE MET
11:03 LANCASTER KANTEENA
24:03 NORTHAMPTON ROADMENDER
25:03 NORWICH WATERFRONT
22:04 SHEFFIELD O2 ACADEMY#
10:06 BURNLEY MECHANICS
22:07 KENDAL BREWERY ARTS
29:07 CASTLETON DEVILS ARSE CAVE
30:09 BILSTON THE ROBIN
#FOR THOSE ABOUT TO ROCK SHOW WITH GUESTS FU FIGHTERS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TUESDAY 09 MAY NORWICH WATERFRONT
WEDNESDAY 10 MAY MANCHESTER ACADEMY
FRIDAY 12 MAY NEWCASTLE BOILER SHOP
SATURDAY 13 MAY GLASGOW GARAGE
SUNDAY 14 MAY EDINBURGH LABELLE
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April 28th - Blackpool Waterloo
April 29th - Chesterfield Realtime
May 4th - Cardiff Clwb Ifor Bach
May 5th - Milton Keynes Craufurd
May 6th - Norwich Waterfront Studio
May 11th - Leeds Brudenell
May 12th - Glasgow Oran Mor
May 13th - Newcastle The Cluny
May 18th - Manchester N&D
May 19th - Birmingham Castle & Falcon
May 20th - Bristol Exchange
Sept 2nd - London O2 Forum Kentish Town

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Tour Dates

AIRBOURNE

Manchester	Albert Hall	Jul 26
London	Kentish Town Forum	Jul 27
Glasgow	QMU	Jul 31

TORI AMOS

Edinburgh	Queens Hall	Mar 25
Belfast	Ulster Hall	Mar 27
Dublin	Olympia	Mar 28
Liverpool	Philharmonic Hall	Mar 31
Cambridge	Corn Exchange	Apr 1
London	Royal Albert Hall	Apr 3

THE ANSWER

Blackpool	Waterloo Bar	Mar 16
Birmingham	Institute	Mar 17
Bristol	Thekla	Mar 19
London	100 Club	Mar 20
Leeds	Key Club	Mar 21
Belfast	Limelight 2	Mar 23
Dublin	Opium	Jun 18

ELLES BAILEY

Cardiff	The Globe	Mar 3
Exeter	Phoenix Arts Centre	Mar 4
Liverpool	Academy 2	Mar 9
Hull	The Social	Mar 10
Sunderland	Firestation	Mar 11
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Mar 14
York	Crescent Arts Centre	Mar 15
Edinburgh	The Caves	Mar 16
Brighton	Komedia	Mar 21
Cambridge	Junction 2	Mar 22
Southampton	1865	Mar 23
London	King's Cross Lafayette	Apr 1
Newbury	Arlington Arts Centre	Apr 14
Bristol	Trinity Centre	Apr 15

ELLES BAILEY, CHANTEL MCGREGOR

Leeds	Brudenell Social Club	Mar 17
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Mar 18

BEAUX GRIS GRIS & THE APOCALYPSE

Sittingbourne	Music Club	Apr 27
Bruton	Magic Teapot Gathering	Apr 28
Poynton	Bluefunk Club	Apr 29
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Apr 30
Newbury	Arlington Arts Centre	May 2
Chislehurst	Beaverwood Club	May 3
Lincoln	Blues Rhythm & Rock Festival	May 6
Brecon	The Muse	May 7
Leamington Spa	Temperance Bar	May 8
Stockton	Blues Rhythm & Rock Festival	May 13

BLAZE BAYLEY, ABSOLVA

Grimsby	Yardbirds	Mar 3
Glasgow	Ivory Black	Mar 4
Newcastle	Trillians	Mar 5
Crumlin	The Patriot	Mar 9
Peterborough	Met Lounge	Mar 10
London	Camden Underworld	Mar 11
Cannock	The Station	Mar 12
Norwich	Brickmakers	Mar 16
Sheffield	Corporation	Mar 17
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Mar 18
Stoke-on-Trent	Eleven	Mar 19

BIG THIEF

Gateshead	The Sage	Apr 5
Edinburgh	Usher Hall	Apr 6
Manchester	Apollo	Apr 7
Cardiff	Great Hall	Apr 8
London	Brixton Academy	Apr 11
London	Hammersmith Apollo	Apr 12

BLACKBERRY SMOKE, READ SOUTHALL BAND

Birmingham	Academy	Mar 26
Glasgow	Academy	Mar 27
Belfast	Telegraph Building	Mar 29
Dublin	Olympia	Mar 30
London	Chalk Farm Roundhouse	Apr 1
Manchester	Academy	Apr 2

Recommended

THE BLACK KEYS

London	O2 Arena	Jun 21
Manchester	AO Arena	Jun 22
Glasgow	The Hydro	Jun 24

TO BE RETAINED ISSUED SUBJECT TO THE CONDITIONS ON BACK

BLINK 182, THE STORY SO FAR

Glasgow	The Hydro	Sep 2
Belfast	SSE Arena	Sep 4
Dublin	3Arena	Sep 5
London	O2 Arena	Oct 11, 12
Birmingham	Utilita Arena	Oct 14
Manchester	AO Arena	Oct 15

THE BLOCKHEADS

Cambridge	Junction	May 5
Birmingham	The Crossing	May 6
London	Gt Portland St 229 Club	May 12
Northampton	Roadmender	May 13

JOE BONAMASSA

Bournemouth	BIC	May 9
Blackpool	Opera House	May 10
Leeds	First Direct Arena	May 12
Newcastle	Utilita Arena	May 13
Birmingham	Utilita Arena	May 14

BRAVE RIVAL

Gt Yarmouth	Legends Of Rock Fest	Mar 4
London	Putney Half Moon	Apr 6
Hook	Echo Hotel Music Club	Apr 15
Bosworth	Blues Festival	May 7
London	Chelsea Blues Festival	May 21
Stockton-on-Tees	Blues On The Bay	May 26
Saltburn	New Marske Institute	May 27

DANNY BRYANT

Hartlepool	South Durham WMC	May 27

BULLET FOR MY VALENTINE, JINGER, ATREYU

Newcastle	City Hall	Mar 3
Glasgow	Barrowland	Mar 4
Leeds	Academy	Mar 6
Birmingham	Academy	Mar 7
Southampton	Guildhall	Mar 8
Swansea	Arena	Mar 10
London	Chalk Farm Roundhouse	Mar 11

CAMEL

Manchester	Apollo	Jun 2
Edinburgh	Usher Hall	Jun 3
Dublin	Vicar Street	Jun 4
Southampton	Guildhall	Jun 6
Aylesbury	Friars Waterside	Jun 7
Birmingham	Symphony Hall	Jun 8
London	Hammersmith Apollo	Jun 10

CANNIBAL CORPSE

Bristol	Academy	Apr 18
Glasgow	Barrowland	Apr 19
Manchester	Academy	Apr 21
London	Kentish Town Forum	Apr 22
Nottingham	Rock City	Apr 23

CARCASS

Glasgow	Slay	Mar 15
Belfast	Limelight	Mar 16
Limerick	Dolans	Mar 17
Dublin	Academy	Mar 18

CARDINAL BLACK

Leeds	Brudenell Social Club	Apr 12
Manchester	Academy 3	Apr 13
Bristol	Trinity	Apr 19
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Apr 20
Guildford	Boileroom	Apr 26
London	Islington Assembly Hall	Apr 27
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	May 4
Hull	The Social	May 5
Glasgow	Room 2	May 6
Newcastle	Anarchy Brewing Co	May 7
Chepstow	Castle	Aug 24

CATS IN SPACE

Lancaster	Grand Theatre	Jul 21
Hexham	Queens Theatre	Jul 22

GAZ COOMBES

Dublin	Academy	Apr 14
Belfast	Limelight 2	Apr 15
Glasgow	Garage	Apr 17
Newcastle	Boiler Shop	Apr 18
Sheffield	Leadmill	Apr 19
Birmingham	The Mill	Apr 21
Manchester	Club Academy	Apr 22
Cambridge	Junction	Apr 24
Norwich	Waterfront	Apr 25
Brighton	Concorde 2	Apr 27
Bristol	SWX	Apr 28
London	Camden Electric Ballroom	Apr 29

CHERIE CURRIE, BLUE RUIN

Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Mar 15
Buckley	Tivoli	Mar 17
Dublin	Workman's Cellar	Mar 18
Belfast	Voodoo	Mar 19
Newcastle	Trillians	Mar 21

CLASSIC ROCK RECOMMENDS

EUROPE

Da-da da daaa, da-da-da da daaaa…You know the song. And the Swedes have more crackers too. The countdown starts now.

See below for dates. Currently October 17 to Octobe 26.

Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Mar 22
Crumlin	The Patriot	Mar 24
Northampton	Roadmender	Mar 25
Bradford	Nightrain	Mar 26
London	Camden Underworld	Mar 27

THE DAMNED, THE NIGHTINGALES

Cardiff	Great Hall	Mar 31
Southend-on-Sea	Cliffs Pavilion	Apr 1
Oxford	Academy	Apr 2
Nottingham	Rock City	Apr 4
Liverpool	Academy	Apr 5
Newcastle	NX	Apr 7
Glasgow	Academy	Apr 8
Leeds	Academy	Apr 10
Manchester	Albert Hall	Apr 11
Birmingham	Town Hall	Apr 13
Bristol	Academy	Apr 14
Norwich	The Nick Rayns	Apr 15
Brighton	Dome	Apr 17
Southampton	Guildhall	Apr 18
London	Alexandra Palace Theatre	Apr 20

DEAD KENNEDYS

Southampton	1865	May 5
Bristol	SWX	May 6
Birmingham	Academy	May 7
Norwich	Waterfront	May 9
Manchester	Academy	May 10
Newcastle	Boiler Shop	May 12
Glasgow	Garage	May 13
Edinburgh	La Belle Angele	May 14
London	Camden Electric Ballroom	May 16
Bexhill-on-Sea	De La Warr Pavilion	May 17

DEF LEPPARD, MÖTLEY CRÜE

Sheffield	Bramall Lane	May 22
London	Wembley Stadium	Jul 1
Lancashire	Lytham Festival	Jul 2
Dublin	Marlay Park	Jul 4
Glasgow	Hampden Park	Jul 6

DEPECHE MODE

London	Twickenham Stadium	Jun 17

ELIXIR, TRESPASS

London	Stratford Cart & Horses	May 27

EMPYRE

Northampton	Black Prince	Mar 11
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Apr 22
Swansea	Station 18 Festival	Apr 30
Kettering	Arts Centre	May 20
Bournemouth	Loverocks Festival	Jun 2, 3
Ebbw Vale	Steelhouse Festival	Jul 30

EUROPE

Cardiff	St David's Hall	Oct 17
Glasgow	Royal Concert Hall	Oct 18
Gateshead	The Sage	Oct 19
Wolverhampton	The Halls	Oct 21
Salford	The Lowry	Oct 22
Leicester	De Montfort Hall	Oct 24
London	Palladium	Oct 25, 26

SAMANTHA FISH

Sunderland	The Fire Station	Oct 19
Glasgow	Barrowland	Oct 20
Manchester	The Ritz	Oct 21
Bristol	SWX	Oct 22
York	Barbican	Oct 24
Cambridge	Junction	Oct 25
Bournemouth	Academy	Oct 26
Bexhill-on-Sea	De La Warr Pavilion	Oct 27
Birmingham	Institute	Oct 28

THE FLAMING LIPS

London	Limehouse Troxy	Apr 25
London	Hammersmith Apollo	Apr 28
Manchester	Apollo	Apr 29

FM, TYKETTO, DARE

Glasgow	Garage	May 11
Newcastle	Riverside	May 12
Nottingham	Rock City	May 13
Barnsley	Birdwell Venue	May 14
Hull	The Welly	May 16
Buckley	Tivoli	May 18
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	May 19
Newport	The Neon	May 20
Manchester	Academy 2	May 21
Southampton	1865	May 23
Norwich	Epic Studios	May 24
London	Islington Academy	May 25

FOCUS, EDGAR BROUGHTON

London	Shepherd's Bush Bush Hall	Apr 20

CHRIS FRANTZ & TINA WEYMOUTH

Oxford	Sheldonian Theatre	May 25
London	Camden Electric Ballroom	May 27
Leeds	Brundell Social Club	May 28

HENRIK FREISCHLADER

Manchester	Academy 3	May 3
Edinburgh	Voodoo Rooms	May 4
Hartlepool	South Durham Social Club	May 5
Lincoln	Blues, Rhythm & Rock Festival	May 6
Bilston	Robin 2	May 7
London	Oxford Street 100 Club	May 9

GOO GOO DOLLS

Dublin	Vicar St	Jun 13
Birmingham	Institute	Jun 15
Bristol	Academy	Jun 16
Bournemouth	Academy	Jun 17
Nottingham	Rock City	Jun 19
Glasgow	Academy	Jun 20
Sheffield	Academy	Jun 22
Manchester	Academy	Jun 23
London	Brixton Academy	Jun 24

PETER GABRIEL

Birmingham	Utilita Arena	Jun 17
London	O2 Arena	Jun 19
Glasgow	The Hydro	Jun 22
Manchester	AO Arena	Jun 23
Dublin	3 Arena	Jun 25

BILLY F GIBBONS

London	Shepherd's Bush Empire	Jul 2
Birmingham	Academy	Jul 3
Bournemouth	Academy	Jul 11

GINGER PLAYS THE WILDHEARTS (UNPLUGGED)

Crumlin	The Patriot	Apr 14
Milton Keynes	Craufurd Arms	Apr 28
Guildford	Boileroom	Apr 30
Bradford	Nightrain	May 12

WILL IRELAND

LIVE!

Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	May 21
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Jun 9
London	West Hampstead Arts Club	Jun 17, 22
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Jul 8
Sheffield	The Greystones	Sep 22

GRAHAM GOULDMAN

Bury St Edmunds	The Apex	Mar 6
Sunderland	Fire Station	Mar 7
Glasgow	Saint Luke's Church	Mar 8
Buxton	Floral Pavilion	Mar 9
Holmfirth	The Civic	Mar 10
Stamford	Corn Exchange	Mar 12
Lytham St Annes	Lowther Pavilion	Mar 13
Southport	The Atkinson	Mar 14
Shoreham-by-Sea	Ropetackle Arts Centre	Mar 15
London	Cadogan Hall	Mar 16
Basingstoke	The Haymarket	May 18
Oswaldtwistle	Civic Arts Centre	Mar 19
Lincoln	Drill Hall	Mar 20
Wavendon	The Stables	Mar 21
Shrewsbury	Theatre Severn	Mar 22
Salford	Quays	Mar 23

MYKE GRAY'S SKIN

Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Aug 18
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Aug 19
Gravesend	Red Lion	Aug 20

GUN

Newport	Patriot	Mar 31
Narbeth	Queens Hall	Apr 1
Buckley	Tivoli	Apr 2
Dundee	Beat Generator	Apr 6
Bathgate	Dreadnought Rock	Apr 7
Paisley	Bungalow	Apr 9
Stoke-on-Trent	Eleven	Apr 13
Raynes Park	Cavern	Apr 14
Dover	Booking Hall	Apr 15
Gravesend	Red Lion	Apr 16
Manchester	Night & Day Café	Apr 17
Norwich	Waterfront	Apr 19
Brighton	The Albert	Apr 20
Southend-on-Sea	Chinnerys	Apr 21
Milton Keynes	Craufurd Arms	Apr 22
London	Oxford Street 100 Club	May 5

GUNS N' ROSES

London	Hyde Park BST Festival	Jun 30

HAKEN, BETWEEN THE BURIED AND ME

Bristol	SWX	Mar 23
Manchester	Academy 2	Mar 24
Glasgow	Garage	Mar 25
London	Shepherd's Bush Empire	Mar 26

Recommended

BETH HART, CONNOR SELBY

Glasgow	Royal Concert Hall	Mar 7
Birmingham	Symphony Hall	Mar 9
Sheffield	City Hall	Mar 11
Manchester	Bridgewater Hall	Mar 13
Newcastle	City Hall	Mar 15
London	Palladium	Mar 17, 18
Brighton	Dome	Mar 21

HAYSEED DIXIE, THE HOT DAMN!

Manchester	Gorilla	Mar 3
Leeds	Brudenell Social Club	Mar 4
Stroud	Subscription Rooms	Mar 17
Frome	Cheese & Grain	Mar 18
Exeter	Phoenix Arts Centre	Mar 20
Weymouth	Pavilion	Mar 21
Bournemouth	Old Fire Station	Mar 22
London	Highbury Garage	Mar 23
Norwich	Waterfront	Mar 24
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Mar 25

STEVE HILLAGE, THE UTOPIA STRONG

Cambridge	Junction	Mar 21
Norwich	Epic Studios	Mar 22
Newcastle	University	Mar 23
Nottingham	Rock City	Mar 24
Manchester	The Ritz	Mar 25
Glasgow	SWG3	Mar 26
Southampton	1865	Mar 28
Exeter	Phoenix Arts Centre	Mar 29
Bristol	Academy	Mar 30
Birmingham	Institute	Mar 31
London	Kentish Town Forum	Apr 1
Brighton	Concorde 2	Apr 2

JOEL HOEKSTRA & BRANDON GIBBS

Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Apr 11
Glasgow	Ivory Blacks	Apr 12
London	Camden Underworld	Apr 13
Norwich	Brickmakers	Apr 14
Ipswich	Music Room	Apr 15
Newport	Patriot	Apr 16
Cannock	The Station	Apr 18

Newcastle	Trillians	Apr 19
Grimsby	Yardbirds	Apr 20
Oldham	Whittles	Apr 21
Ballymena	Diamond Rock Club	Apr 22
Dublin	Grand Social	Apr 23

HOLLYWOOD VAMPIRES, THE TUBES, SEETHER

Scarborough	Open Air Theatre	Jul 5
Swansea	Arena	Jul 7
Manchester	AO Arena	Jul 8
London	O2 Arena	Jul 9
Birmingham	Utilita Arena	Jul 11
Glasgow	The Hydro	Jul 12

IRON MAIDEN

Dublin	3 Arena	Jun 24
Glasgow	The Hydro	Jun 26
Leeds	First Direct Arena	Jun 28
Manchester	AO Arena	Jun 30
Nottingham	Motorpoint Arena	Jul 3
Birmingham	Utilita Arena	Jul 4
London	O2 Arena	Jul 7, 8

THE JAYHAWKS

London	Shepherd's Bush Empire	Apr 24

ELTON JOHN

London	O2 Arena	Jun 2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 12, 13, 16, 17, May 30
Birmingham	Resorts World Arena	Apr 19
Manchester	AO Arena	May 31, Jun 2, 3
Leeds	First Direct Arena	Jun 6
Birmingham	Utilita Arena	Jun 8, 10, 11
Aberdeen	PJ Live	Jun 13, 15
Glasgow	The Hydro	Jun 17, 18

LAURENCE JONES

Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Mar 3
Bristol	Thekla	Mar 8
Bridport	Arts Centre	Mar 9
Sutton	Boom Boom Club	Mar 10
Carlisle	Old Fire Station	Mar 22
Kinross	Green Hotel	Mar 23
Hartlepool	South Durham Social Club	Mar 24
Cork	Rory Gallagher Festival	Jun 2
Worthing	The Factory	Jun 29
Alford	Rock & Blues Festival	Jun 30

KERBDOG

Bristol	The Fleece	Mar 16
London	Islington Academy	Mar 17
Leeds	Key Club	Mar 18
Glasgow	Cathouse	Mar 19

KILLING JOKE

London	Royal Albert Hall	Mar 12

MARCUS KING

London	Kentish Town Forum	Mar 21
Bristol	Academy	Mar 22
Glasgow	SWG3	Mar 23
Leeds	Beckett University	Mar 25
Manchester	The Ritz	Mar 26
Dublin	Academy	Mar 27

KING GIZZARD & THE LIZARD WIZARD

London	Brixton Academy	Mar 22, 23

KING KING, GLENN TILBROOK

Leeds	Academy	Mar 4
Newcastle	Boiler Shop	Mar 5
London	Camden Electric Ballroom	Mar 9
Norwich	Waterfront	Mar 10
Manchester	Academy	Mar 11
Nottingham	Rock City	Mar 12
New Brighton	Floral Pavilion	Mar 14
Cardiff	Y Plas Nightclub	Mar 16
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Mar 17
Oxford	Academy	Mar 18
Bexhill-on-Sea	De La Warr Pavilion	Mar 19
Leamington Spa	The Assembly	Mar 22
Exeter	Phoenix Arts Centre	Mar 24
Frome	Cheese & Grain	Mar 25
Bournemouth	Old Fire Station	Mar 26
Cambridge	Junction	Mar 29
Blackburn	King George's Hall	Mar 30

KIRA MAC

Chester	Live Rooms	May 17
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	May 18
Glasgow	G2	May 19
Sheffield	Corporation	May 21
Southampton	1865	May 30
Bristol	Thekla	May 31
Birmingham	Asylum	Jun 2
Stoke-on-Trent	Sugarmill	Jun 3
London	Highbury	Garage Jun 4

KISS, SKINDRED, THE WILD THINGS

Plymouth	Argyle Home Park	Jun 3
Birmingham	Resorts World Arena	Jun 5
Newcastle	Utilita Arena	Jun 6
London	O2 Arena	Jul 5
Manchester	AO Arena	Jul 7
Glasgow	The Hydro	Jul 8

CLASSIC ROCK RECOMMENDS

STEELHOUSE FESTIVAL

Airbourne, Black Stone Cherry (pictured) and the Kris Barras Band lead the charge up a Welsh mountain in July.

Ebbw Vale	Hafod-y-Dafal Farm	Jul 28-30

LAMB OF GOD, KREATOR, THY ART IS MURDER, GATECREEPER

Manchester	Academy	Mar 7
Bristol	Academy	Mar 8
Birmingham	Academy	Mar 10
London	Wembley Arena	Mar 11

LARKIN POE

Bristol	Academy	Oct 17
Glasgow	Academy	Oct 18
Manchester	Albert Hall	Oct 20
London	Chalk Farm Roundhouse	Oct 21

THE LAST INTERNATIONALE

Birmingham	Institute	Apr 14
Manchester	Deaf Institute	Apr 15
Glasgow	King Tut's Wah Wah Hut	Apr 16
Leeds	Brudenell Social Club	Apr 18
Bristol	The Fleece	Apr 19
Southampton	Joiners	Apr 21
London	St Pancras Lafayette	Apr 22

JOHN LEES' BARCLAY JAMES HARVEST

Leeds	City Varieties	May 23
London	Islington Assembly Hall	May 28

LEVELLERS (UNPLUGGED)

Liverpool	Philharmonic	Mar 3
Birmingham	Symphony Hall	Mar 4
Cambridge	Corn Exchange	Mar 6
Northampton	Derngate	Mar 7
Reading	Hexagon	Mar 8
London	Hackney Empire	Mar 9
Poole	Lighthouse	Mar 10
Truro	Hall For Cornwall	Mar 11
Barnstaple	Queen's Theatre	Mar 13
Yeovil	Westlands	Mar 14
Harrogate	Royal Hall	Mar 15
Hull	City Hall	Mar 16
Newcastle	Opera House	Mar 17
Buxton	Opera House	Mar 18

LIFESIGNS

Fletching	Trading Boundaries	Mar 3, 4
London	Putney Half Moon	Mar 5
Cardiff	Fuel	Mar 9
Abingdon	Northcourt	Mar 11
Cambridge	Portland Arms	Mar 2

THE LONG RYDERS

Leamington Spa	The Assembly	May 19
London	Gt Portland Street 229 Club	May 20
Leeds	Brudenell Social Club	May 21
Glasgow	Oran More	May 22
Liverpool	The Cavern	May 23
Bristol	The Fleece	May 24
Brighton	Patterns	May 25

MAN

Bilston	Robin 2	Mar 8
Hull	Wrecking Ball	Mar 10
Kinross	Green Hotel	Mar 11
London	Putney Half Moon	Mar 15
Abertillery	The Met	Mar 17

MASSIVE WAGONS, VIRGINMARYS

Portsmouth	Wedgewood Rooms	Apr 13
Cambridge	Junction	Apr 14
Bristol	The Fleece	Apr 15

London	King's Cross Scala	Apr 17
Manchester	Academy 2	Apr 18
Norwich	Epic Studios	Apr 19
Birmingham	Academy 2	Apr 21
Buckley	Tivoli	Apr 22
Leeds	Brudenell Social Club	Apr 24
Edinburgh	La Belle Angele	Apr 25

CHANTEL McGREGOR

Southampton	1865	Mar 5
Leeds	Brudenell Social Club	Mar 17
London	Putney Half Moon	Mar 29
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	May 4
Bury St Edmunds	The Apex	May 5
Bosworth	Blues Festival	May 6
Rotherham	Parkgate Brewery Tap	May 13
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	May 26
Glasgow	Classic Grand	May 27
Aberdeen	Café Drummond	May 28
Silsden	Town Hall	Jun 17
Alford	Blues Festival	Jun 2
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Sep 7
London	Oxford Street 100 Club	Sep 8
Morecambe	The Platform	Oct 21

MIKE + THE MECHANICS

Aberdeen	Music Hall	Apr 15
Perth	Concert Hall	Apr 16
Glasgow	Royal Concert Hall	Apr 18
Edinburgh	Usher Hall	Apr 19
Gateshead	The Sage	Apr 20
Leicester	De Montfort Hall	Apr 22
Hanley	Victoria Hall	Apr 23
Liverpool	Philharmonic Hall	Apr 24
Carlisle	Sands Centre	Apr 26
Sheffield	City Hall	Apr 27
Buxton	Opera House	Apr 28
Northampton	Derngate	Apr 30
Manchester	Bridgewater Hall	May 1
Hull	City Hall	May 2
Bath	Forum	May 4
Basingstoke	The Anvil	May 5
Bournemouth	Pavilion	May 7
Nottingham	Royal Concert Hall	May 8
Cardiff	St David's Hall	May 10
Swansea	Arena	May 11
Eastbourne	Congress Theatre	May 12
Plymouth	Pavilions	May 14
Southend-on-Sea	Cliffs Pavilion	May 16
Oxford	New Theatre	May 17
London	Royal Albert Hall	May 18
Birmingham	Symphony Hall	May 20
Milton Keynes	Theatre	May 21
Llandudno	Venue Cymru	May 22
Guildford	G Live	May 24
Cambridge	Corn Exchange	May 25
Reading	Hexagon	May 26
Portsmouth	Guildhall	May 28

IAN MOSS

Birmingham	Hare & Hounds	Jun 1
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Jun 2
London	Oxford Street 100 Club	Jun 3
Newcastle	The Cluny	Jun 7
Manchester	Dead Institute	Jun 9
Glasgow	Oran Mor	Jun 10

MUSE

Plymouth	Home Park	May 27
Huddersfield	John Smith's Stadium	Jun 20

SABRINA RAMDOYAL

Glasgow	Bellahouston Park	Jun 23
Milton Keynes	National Bowl	Jun 25

PAPA ROACH, DON BROCO

Cardiff	Motorpoint Arena	Mar 21
Leeds	First Direct Arena	Mar 23
Birmingham	Utilita Arena	Mar 24
London	Alexandra Palace	Mar 25

PARAMORE

Dublin	3 Arena	Apr 13
Cardiff	International Arena	Apr 15
Glasgow	The Hydro	Apr 17
Manchester	AO Arena	Apr 18
London	O2 Arena	Apr 20, 23
Birmingham	Utilita Arena	Apr 22

JIZZY PEARL'S LOVE/HATE, DIG LAZARUS

Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Nov 1
Great Yarmouth	Hard Rock Hell Fest	Nov 2
Buckley	Tivoli	Nov 3
Crumlin	The Patriot	Nov 4
London	Camden Underworld	Nov 5

TED POLEY (UNPLUGGED)

Belfast	Deer's Head	Mar 23
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Mar 24
Newport	The Patriot	Mar 25
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Mar 26
Newcastle	Trillians	Mar 28
London	Camden Black Heart	Mar 29
Stoke-on-Trent	Eleven	Mar 30
Buckley	Tivoli	Mar 31
Northampton	Black Prince	Apr 2

ANA POPOVIC, TOBY LEE

Chester	Live Rooms	Mar 8
Stroud	Subscription Rooms	Mar 9
London	Islington Academy	Mar 10
Southampton	The Brook	Mar 12

Recommended

PORCUPINE TREE

Manchester	Castlefield Bowl	Jun 29

TO BE RETAINED ... ISSUED SUBJECT TO THE CONDITIONS ON BACK

PUSCIFER

Dublin	Olympia	Jun 10
Glasgow	Academy	Jun 12
Manchester	Academy	Jun 13
London	Venue TBA	Jun 15

SUZI QUATRO

Cardiff	St David's Hall	Nov 12
Brighton	Dome	Nov 13
London	Palladium	Nov 15
Wolverhampton	Civic Hall	Nov 16
Manchester	Bridgewater Hall	Nov 18

THE QUIREBOYS

Coventry	Empire 2	Apr 20
Brighton	Patterns	Apr 21
Dover	Booking Hall	Apr 22
Stockton-on-Tees	Georgian Theatre	Apr 27
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Apr 28
Chesterfield	Real Time	Apr 29
Cardiff	Clwb Ifor Bach	May 4
Milton Keynes	Craufurd Arms	May 5
Norwich	Waterfront Studio	May 6
Leeds	Brudenell Social Club	May 11
Glasgow	Oran Mor	May 12
Newcastle	The Cluny	May 13
Manchester	Night & Day Café	May 18
Birmingham	Castle & Falcon	May 19
Bristol	The Exchange	May 20
London	Kentish Town Forum	Sep 2

BONNIE RAITT

Dublin	Vicar Street	Jun 1
London	Palladium	Jun 3
Bournemouth	Pavilion	Jun 6
Oxford	New Theatre	Jun 7
Gateshead	The Sage	Jun 9
Glasgow	Royal Concert Hall	Jun 11
Manchester	Bridgwater Hall	Jun 14
Birmingham	Symphony Hall	Jun 15
Kent	Black Deer Festival	Jun 17

RANCID, THE BRONX, GRADE 2

London	Brixton Academy	Jun 20
Manchester	Victoria Warehouse	Jun 21

RAVEN

Stoke-on-Trent	Eleven	Mar 2
Newcastle	St Dom's	Mar 3
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Mar 4
Machynlleth	Red Lion	Mar 5
Birmingham	Asylum	Mar 7
Great Yarmouth	Hard Rock Hell	Mar 8
Bradford	Nightrain	Mar 9
Crumlin	The Patriot	Mar 10

GETTY

London	Camden Black Heart	Mar 11
Nuneaton	Queen's Hall	Mar 12

RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS

London	Tottenham Hotspur Stadium	Jul 21
Glasgow	Hampden Park	Jul 23

REEF, WHEN RIVERS MEET

Plymouth	The Dep	Mar 30
Bournemouth	Academy	Mar 31
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Apr 1
Portsmouth	Guildhall	Apr 13
Northampton	Roadmender	Apr 14
Margate	Dreamand	Apr 15
Hastings	White Rock Theatre	Apr 16
Chester	Live Rooms	Apr 21
Hull	The Welly	Apr 22
Guildford	Boileroom	Apr 23

RIVERSIDE

Dublin	Button Factory	Apr 18
Glasgow	Garage	Apr 20
Birmingham	Institute 2	Apr 22
London	IndigO2 Prognosis Festival	Apr 23

HENRY ROLLINS (SPOKEN WORD)

Bexhill-On-Sea	De La Warr Pavilion	Mar 24
Liverpool	Mountford	Mar 25
Dublin	Vicar Street	Mar 26
Belfast	Limelight	Mar 28
Glasgow	Pavilion Theatre	Mar 29
Whitley Bay	Playhouse	Mar 30
Buxton	Opera House	Mar 31
Birmingham	Town Hall	Apr 1
Nottingham	Albert Hall	Apr 2
Cardiff	Tramshed	Apr 3
Bath	Komedia	Apr 4
London	Palladium	Apr 5
Manchester	Bridgewater Hall	Apr 6
Cambridge	Corn Exchange	Apr 7

ROMEO'S DAUGHTER

London	Highbury Garage	Sep 23

SABATON, BABYMETAL, LORDI

Leeds	First Direct Arena	Apr 14
London	Wembley Arena	Apr 15
Cardiff	Motorpoint Arena	Apr 16
Glasgow	The Hydro	Apr 18

JOE SATRIANI

Birmingham	Symphony Hall	May 12
Gateshead	The Sage	May 13
Manchester	Bridgewater Hall	May 14
Bexhill-on-Sea	De La Warr Pavilion	May 16
Glasgow	Academy	May 17

SAXON, SWEET SAVAGE

Dublin	Olympia	Mar 3
Belfast	Ulster Hall	Mar 4

SARI SCHORR

Southampton	1865	Apr 5
Bilston	Robin 2	Apr 6
Cardiff	Acapela Studio	Apr 7
Cranleigh	Arts Centre	Apr 8
Sheffield	Yellow Arch Studios	Apr 14
Glasgow	Classic Grand	Apr 15
London	Putney Half Moon	Apr 19

CHRIS SHIFLETT

Dublin	Whelan's	Mar 21
Glasgow	St Luke's	Mar 22
Leeds	Brudenell Social Club	Mar 24
Manchester	Band On The Wall	Mar 25
Bristol	Thekla	Mar 26
London	King's Cross Scala	Mar 28

KENNY WAYNE SHEPHERD

Warrington	Parr Hall	Apr 18
Edinburgh	Queens Hall	Apr 19
Newcastle	Tyne Theatre	Apr 20
Holmfirth	Picturedrome	Apr 21
Bexhill-on-Sea	De La Warr Pavilion	Apr 22
London	Shepherd's Bush Empire	Apr 23

SOFT MACHINE

Leeds	City Varieties	May 26

SONS OF LIBERTY, PREACHER STONE

Bristol	Thekla	Mar 22
Chesterfield	Real Time Live	Mar 23
Glasgow	Hard Rock Café	Mar 24
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Mar 25
Newcastle	Trillians	Mar 26
Leicester	The Musician	Mar 28
Bradford	Nightrain	Mar 29
Swindon	The Victoria	Mar 30
Gravesend	Red Lion	Mar 31

SPACE ELEVATOR

Cambridge	Portland Arms	Apr 19
St Albans	The Horn	Apr 20
Chislehurst	Beaverwood Club	Apr 21
London	Hammersmith Club	Apr 22
Stoke-on-Trent	Eleven	Apr 23

CLASSIC ROCK RECOMMENDS

BONNIE RAITT

Best-selling artist, highly respected guitarist, accomplished songwriter, and winner of a clutch of Grammys. Go see.

See below for dates. Currently June 1 to June 17.

SPARKS

Oxford	New Theatre	May 23
Liverpool	Royal Philharmonic Hall	May 24
Glasgow	SEC Armadillo	May 26
Manchester	Bridgewater Hall	May 27
London	Royal Albert Hall	May 29, 30

SPIKE (ACOUSTIC)

Gt Yarmouth	Legends of Rock Fest	Mar 5
Belfast	Voodoo	Mar 11
Raynes Park	The Cavern	Mar 19
Leicester	The Musician	Apr 29

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN & THE E STREET BAND

Dublin	RDS Arena	May 5, 7
Edinburgh	Murrayfield Stadium	May 30
Birmingham	Villa Park	Jun 16
London	Hyde Park BST Festival	Jul 6, 8

SPIRITBOX, LOATHE, BRAND OF SACRIFICE

Birmingham	Institute	Jul 5
Manchester	Victoria Warehouse	Jul 6
Glasgow	Barrowland	Jul 7
Belfast	Limelight	Jul 9
Dublin	Academy	Jul 10
Bristol	Academy	Jul 12
London	Chalk Farm Roundhouse	Jul 13, 14

VIVIAN STANSHALL'S 80TH BIRTH DAY PARTY

London	Highbury Union Chapel	Mar 23

STEEL PANTHER, WINGER

Glasgow	Academy	May 14
Newcastle	City Hall	May 15
Manchester	Academy	May 17
Birmingham	Academy	May 18
London	Kentish Town Forum	May 20
Bristol	Academy	May 21
Leeds	Academy	May 23
Belfast	Ulster Hall	May 25
Cork	Cyprus Avenue	May 26
Dublin	Vicar Street	May 28

STIFF LITTLE FINGERS, SLIM JIM PHANTOM TRIO

Bristol	Academy	Mar 9
Cardiff	Tramshed	Mar 10
Birmingham	Academy	Mar 11
Portsmouth	Guildhall	Mar 13
Cambridge	Junction	Mar 14
Newcastle	City Hall	Mar 16
Glasgow	Barrowland	Mar 17, 18
Nottingham	Rock City	Mar 20
Norwich	Epic Studios	Mar 21
Leeds	Academy	Mar 23
Manchester	Academy	Mar 24
London	Chalk Farm Roundhouse	Mar 25

GEOFF TATE

Sheffield	Corporation	Jun 14
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Jun 15
Nuneaton	Queens Hall	Jun 16
Newport	The Moon	Jun 17
London	Highbury Garage	Jun 18
Bradford	Nightrain	Jun 20
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Jun 21
Buckley	Tivoli	Jun 22
Newcastle	The Cluny	Jun 23

Belfast	Mandela Hall	Jun 28
Dublin	Tramline	Jun 29

TENACIOUS D

London	O2 Arena	Jun 16

THESE WICKED RIVERS, GORILLA RIOT

Cardiff	Fuel	Mar 3
Gravesend	Red Lion	Mar 4
Nottingham	Bodega	Mar 5
Huddersfield	Parish	Mar 10
Galashiels	Mac Arts Centre	Mar 11
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Mar 12

THUNDERSTICK, SACRILEGE

London	Camden Underworld	Mar 31

TIGERTAILZ, KICKIN' VALENTINA, STAR CIRCUS

London	Camden Underworld	Jun 3

DEVIN TOWNSEND

Bexhill-on-Sea	De La Warr Pavilion	Mar 28
Bristol	Academy	Mar 29
Manchester	Academy	Mar 31
Nottingham	Rock City	Apr 1
Newcastle	University	Apr 2
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Apr 4
Norwich	UEA	Apr 5

TOYAH & ROBERT FRIPP'S SUNDAY LUNCH ROCK PARTY

Worcester	Huntingdon Hall	May 26, 27
Wimborne	Tivoli	Sep 30
Cheltenham	Town Hall	Oct 1
Harrogate	Royal Hall	Oct 7
Whitley	Bay Playhouse	Oct 8
Salford	The Lowry	Oct 9
Worthing	Assembly Hall	Oct 14
Liverpool	Philharmonic Hall	Oct 16
Bury St Edmunds	The Apex	Oct 19
Basingstoke	The Anvil	Oct 20
London	Shepherd's Bush Empire	Oct 21
Buxton	Opera House	Oct 25
Shrewsbury	Theatre Severn	Oct 26
Swansea	Grand Theatre	Oct 28
Birmingham	Town Hall	Oct 29

WALTER TROUT

Exeter	Phoenix Arts Centre	May 9
Birmingham	Town Hal	May 10
Holmfirth	Picturedrome	May 12
Sunderland	Fire Station	May 13
Glasgow	Oran Mor	May 14
Liverpool	Epstein Theatre	May 16
Cambridge	Junction	May 17
Ilkley	Kings Hall	May 18
Gateshead	The Sag	May 19
Manchester	Academy 2	May 20
London	Islington Assembly Hall	May 21

MARTIN TURNER EX-WISHBONE ASH

Chelmsford	Social Club	Mar 3
St Helens	Citadel	Mar 5
Maidenhead	Norden Farm Centre	Mar 10
Derby	Flowerpot	Mar 16
Sheffield	The Greystones	Mar 17
Hull	Wrecking Ball Arts Centre	Mar 18

LIVE!

Bilston	Robin 2	Mar 19
Morecambe	The Platform	Mar 22
Glasgow	The Ferry	Mar 23
Kinross	Green Hotel	Mar 24, 25
Newcastle	The Cluny	Mar 26
Southampton	1865	Mar 30
Dartmouth	Flavel	Apr 1
Chislehurst	Beaverwood Club	Sep 7
Fletching	Trading Boundaries	Sep 8
Havant	The Spring	Sep 9
Worcester	Huntingdon Hall	Sep 10
Sudbury	Quay Theatre	Sep 14
Wokingham	British Legion	Sep 15
London	Oxford Street 100 Club	Sep 16
Bath	Chapel Arts Centre	Sep 22
Howden	Shire Hall	Sep 23
Barnoldswick	Music & Arts Centre	Sep 24
Banbury	Mill Arts Centre	Sep 28
Gravesend	Red Lion	Oct 6
Tavistock	The Wharf	Oct 7
Wigan	Old Courts	Oct 13

SHANIA TWAIN

Glasgow	Hydro	Sep 14, 22
London	O2 Arena	Sep 16
Dublin	3 Arena	Sep 19
Manchester	AO Arena	Sep 25
Birmingham	Utilita Arena	Sep 26
Leeds	First Direct Arena	Sep 28

VILLE VALO

Bristol	Academy	Mar 10
Nottingham	Rock City	Mar 11
Glasgow	Garage	Mar 13
Manchester	The Ritz	Mar 14
London	Kentish Town Forum	Mar 15

VOIVOD

Bristol	The Fleece	Apr 18
Glasgow	Slay	Apr 19
Manchester	Rebellion	Apr 20
Southampton	1865	Apr 21
London	Prognosis Festival	Apr 22

W.A.S.P.

Manchester	Academy	Mar 17
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Mar 18
Nottingham	Rock City	Mar 19
Glasgow	Academy	Mar 21
Newcastle	City Hall	Mar 22
Bristol	Academy	Mar 23
London	Chalk Farm Roundhouse	Mar 24
Dublin	National Stadium	Mar 25
Belfast	Ulster Hall	Mar 26

ROGER WATERS

Birmingham	Utilita Arena	May 31
Glasgow	The Hydro	Jun 2
London	O2 Arena	Jun 6, 7
Manchester	AO Arena	Jun 10

WEDNESDAY 13, SOUTH OF SALEM, SICK N' BEAUTIFUL

Bristol	Thekla	Apr 6
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Apr 7
London	Tufnell Park Dome	Apr 8
Glasgow	Cathouse	Apr 10
Newcastle	Riverside	Apr 11
Manchester	Club Academy	Apr 12
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Apr 13
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Apr 14
Milton Keynes	Craufurd Arms	Apr 15

WHEN RIVERS MEET, ARIELLE

Colchester	Arts Centre	Apr 28
Norwich	Waterfront	Apr 29
Brighton	Komedia	May 4
London	St Pancras Lafayette	May 6
Bristol	The Fleece	May 11
Birmingham	Asylum	May 12
Southampton	1865	May 13
Tavistock	The Wharf	May 14
Barnard Castle	The Witham	May 19
Glasgow	The Garage	May 20
Newcastle	University	May 21
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	May 25
Bradford	Nightrain	May 26
Manchester	Academy 3	May 27

THE WHO WITH ORCHESTRA

Hull	Craven Park	Jul 6
Edinburgh	Castle	Jul 8, 9
London	O2 Arena	Jul 12
Derby	County Ground	Jul 14
Bristol	Badminton Estate	Jul 16
Durham	Riverside	Jul 9
St Helens	Stadium	Jul 21
Brighton	County Ground	Jul 23

WILLE & THE BANDITS

Edinburgh	Voodoo Rooms	Mar 3
Newcastle Upon-Tyne	The Cluny	Mar 4
Worcester	Drummonds	Mar 9
Manchester	Deaf Institute	Mar 10
Nottingham	Bodega Social Club	Mar 11
Oxford	Bullingdon Arms	Mar 16

Cardiff	Clwb Ifor Bach	Mar 17
Birmingham	Actress & Bishop	Mar 18
Sheffield	The Greystones	Mar 19

DAMIAN WILSON & ADAM WAKEMAN

Ilfracombe	Landmark Theatre	Mar 3
Mylor	Tremayne Hall	Mar 4
Torrington	Plough Arts Centre	Mar 5

Recommended

THE WINERY DOGS

Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Jun 16
Nottingham	Rock City	Jun 17
London	Shepherd's Bush Empire	Jun 18

TO BE RETAINED ISSUED SUBJECT TO THE CONDITIONS ON BACK

WISHBONE ASH

Colchester	Arts Centre	Apr 27
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Apr 28
Barnsley	Birdwell Venue	Apr 29
Durham	Northern Kin Festival	Apr 30

YES

Birmingham	Symphony Hall	Jun 10
Southend-on-Sea	Cliffs Pavilion	Jun 11
York	Barbican	Jun 12
Glasgow	Royal Concert Hall	Jun 14
Gateshead	The Sage	Jun 15
Liverpool	Philharmonic Hall	Jun 16
Manchester	Bridgewater Hall	Jun 18
London	Hammersmith Apollo	Jun 20

THE ZOMBIES

Wimborne	Tivoli Theatre	Apr 5
Exmouth	Pavilion	Apr 6
Fletching	Trading Boundaries	Apr 7, 8
Pontardawe	Arts Centre	Apr 12
Bristol	The Fleece	Apr 13
London	Chelsea Under The Bridge	Apr 14
Bury St Edmunds	The Apex	Apr 15
Norwich	Epic	Apr 18
Felixstowe	Spa Pavilion	Apr 19
Harpenden	Eric Morecambe Centre	Apr 20, 21
Kinross	Green Hotel	Apr 23, 24
Glasgow	Òran Mór	Apr 26
Holmfirth	Picturedrome	Apr 27
Bury	The Met	Apr 28
Taunton	Brewhouse Theatre & Arts	Apr 29
Stockton-on-Tees	ARC	May 3
Carlisle	Old Fire Station	May 4
New Brighton	Floral Pavilion	May 5
Wavendon	The Stables	May 6

Festivals

2000 TREES
FRANK CARTER & THE RATTLESNAKES, HUNDRED REASONS, MORE

Cheltenham	Upcote Farm	Jul 6-8

ALFORD ROCK & BLUES FESTIVAL
FOCUS, BAND OF FRIENDS, JACKIE LYNTON, MORE

Alford	Springbok Estate	Jun 30-Jul 2

ARCTANGENT FESTIVAL
CAVE IN, SCALPING, CONJURER, IGORRR, MORE

Somerset	Fernhill Farm	Aug 16-19

BLOODSTOCK FESTIVAL
MEGADETH, KILLSWITCH ENGAGE, HELLOWEEN, MORE

Derbyshire	Catton Park	Aug 10-13

CALL OF THE WILD
THOSE DAMN CROWS, GINGER & THE SINNERS, TERRORVISION MORE

Lincolnshire	Showground	May 26-28

CORNWALL ROCKS
FM, ATOMIC ROOSTER, WHEN RIVERS MEET, MORE

Looe	Tencreek Holiday Park	Oct 6-8

CROPREDY
TOYAH & ROBERT FRIPP, 10CC, STRAWBS, MORE

Copredy	Oxfordshire	Aug 10-12

DESERTFEST
CORROSION OF CONFORMITY, UNCLE ACID & THE DEADBEATS, GRAVEYARD, MORE

London	Camden various venues	May 5-7

DOG DAY AFTERNOON
IGGY POP, BLONDIE, GENERATION SEX

London	Crystal Palace Park	Jul 1

CLASSIC ROCK RECOMMENDS

STONEDEAD FESTIVAL

Blue Öyster Cult, Therapy? and The Answer (pictured) head up this year's noisy (in a good way) day in Newark.

Newark	Showground	Aug 26

WILL IRELAND

DOWNLOAD
METALLICA, SLIPKNOT, BRING ME THE HORIZON

Castle Donington	Racetrack	Jun 8-11

FIRESTORM
KRIS BARRAS, WHEN RIVERS MEET, COLLATERAL, MORE

Manchester	Whitebottom Farm	Aug 11-13

FUSION
IQ, SOLSTICE, THE REASONING, MICK POINTER'S SCRIPT, MORE

Stourport	Civic Centre	Mar 3-5

GLASGOW BLUES, RHYTHM & ROCK FESTIVAL
AYNSLEY LISTER, KEN PUSTELNIK'S GROUNDHOGS, MORE

Glasgow	Oran Mor	May 28

HARD ROCK HELL
PHIL CAMPBELL & THE BASTARD SONS, TYKETTO, GEOFF TATE, MORE

Great Yarmouth	Vauxhall Holiday Park	Nov 2-5

HARD ROCK HELL PROG
JOHN PAYNE'S ASIA, THE FLOWER KINGS, MORE

Sheffield	Academy	Apr 14, 15

HARD ROCK HELL SPRING BREAK
HOUSE OF LORDS, CRASHDÏET, CANDLEMASS, MORE

Great Yarmouth	Vauxhall Holiday Park	Mar 8-12

HIGHWAYS
KIP MOORE, MORGAN WADE, JACKSON DEAN, MORE

London	Royal Albert Hall	May 20

LATITUDE
SIOUXSIE SIOUX, MORE

Suffolk	Henham Park	Jul 20-23

LINCOLN BLUES, RHYTHM & ROCK FESTIVAL
HENRIK FREISCHLADER, THE CINELLI BROTHERS, MORE

Lincoln	The Drill	May 6

LOOE BLUES, RHYTHM & ROCK FESTIVAL
THE CINELLI BROTHERS, MORE

Looe	Tencreek Holiday Park	Dec 1-2

MAID OF STONE
AIRBOURNE, SKINDRED, PHIL CAMPBELL & THE BASTARD SONS, MORE

Maidstone	Mote Park	Jul 22, 23

MAYORS ROCK FEST
THESE WICKED RIVERS, THE HOT DAMN!, GORILLA RIOT, MORE

Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Apr 8, 9

MIDNIGHT SUN WEEKENDER
JOHN FOGERTY, THE PRETENDERS, PRIMAL SCREAM, MORE

Stornoway	Lews Castle	May 25-27

A NEW DAY FESTIVAL
OZRIC TENTACLES, STEVE HILLAGE & SYSTEM 7, CARAVAN, MORE

Faversham	Mount Ephraim Gardens	Aug 18-20

PRIMORDIAL GENERAL MAYHEM
THOSE DAMN CROWES, SOUTH OF SALEM, MORE

Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Apr 29

PROGNOSIS
HAWKWIND, RIVERSIDE, VOIVOD, MORE

London	IndigO2	Apr 22, 23

RADAR
PERIPHERY, HAKEN, LOATHE, MORE

Manchester	BEC Arena	Jul 28-30

READING & LEEDS FESTIVALS
THE KILLERS, IMAGINE DRAGONS, MORE

Reading	Richfield Avenue	Aug 25-27
Leeds	Bramham Park	Aug 25-27

SOUTHPORT BLUES, RHYTHM & ROCK FESTIVAL
FULL HOUSE PLAYS FRANKIE MILLER, BRAVE RIVAL, MORE

Southport	The Atkinson	Oct 28

STATION 18 FESTIVAL
HOLLOWSTAR, THE TREATMENT, CHEZ KANE, MORE

Swansea	Hangar 18	Apr 29-May 1

STEELHOUSE
AIRBOURNE, BLACK STONE CHERRY, KRIS BARRAS BAND, MORE

Ebbw Vale	Hafod-y-Dafal Farm	Jul 28-30

STOCKTON BLUES, RHYTHM & ROCK FESTIVAL
TEN YEARS AFTER, LAURENCE JONES, BLUE NATION, MORE

Stockton-on-Tees	The ARC	May 13

STONEDEAD
BLUE ÖYSTER CULT, THERAPY?, THE ANSWER, MORE

Newark	Showground	Aug 26

TAKEDOWN
SKINDRED, SLEEP TOKEN, LOATHE, JAMIE LENMAN, INME MORE

Portsmouth	Guildhall	Apr 8

TOMORROW'S GHOSTS
THEATRE OF HATE, THE 69 EYES, THE MARCH VIOLETS, MORE

Whitby	Pavilion	Oct 27, 28

TOMORROW'S GHOSTS, SPRING GATHERING
NEW MODEL ARMY, CHRISTIAN DEATH, COLD CAVE, MORE

Whitby	Pavilion	Apr 28, 29

WHITBY ROCKS
COLLATERAL, THESE WICKED RIVERS, BRAVE RIVAL, MORE

Whitby	Pavilion	Nov 10

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SUN 05 MILTON SOLD OUT ABLES *
MARCH 2023
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SAT 04 EXETER PHOENIX
THU 09 LIVERPOOL O2 ACADEMY 2
FRI 10 HULL THE SOCIAL
SAT 11 SUNDERLAND THE FIRE STATION
TUE 14 WOLVERHAMPTON KK'S STEEL MILL
WED 15 YORK THE CRESCENT
THU 16 EDINBURGH THE CAVES
FRI 17 LEEDS BRUDENELL SOCIAL CLUB *
TUE 21 BRIGHTON KOMEDIA BASEMENT
WED 22 CAMBRIDGE JUNCTION 2
THU 23 SOUTHAMPTON 1865
APRIL 2023
SAT 01 LONDON LAFAYETTE
FRI 14 NEWBURY ARLINGTON ARTS
SAT 15 BRISTOL TRINITY
MAY 2023
THU 18 NOTTINGHAM RESCUE ROOMS*
FRI 19 SHEFFIELD CORPORATION
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'Rock needs bands like The Darkness and Black Stone Cherry.'

Black Stone Cherry's Chris Robertson and (right, bottom) Ben Wells deliver what is effectively a 'greatest hits' set.

Black Stone Cherry / The Darkness / Danko Jones

Leeds First Direct Arena

Transatlantic tourmates bring their big rock show to West Yorkshire.

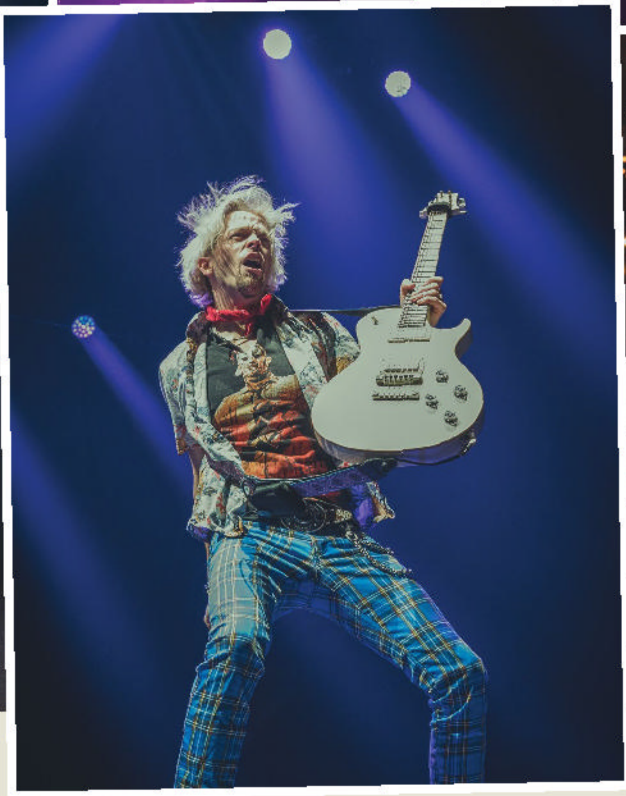
Danko Jones: high-voltage rock, but struggled to make a lasting impression.

★ For all their differences – be it geographical, idiosyncratic or stylistic – opposites really do attract in the case of tonight's co-headliners. Joining forces from either side of the pond, what matters here is that both Black Stone Cherry – Kentucky's southern-rock kings – and The Darkness – Britain's modern-day classic-rock royalty – worship at the altar of the almighty guitar riff. And not many do it better.

The plum job of kicking things off goes to Danko Jones, and a healthy audience is already present. With many presumably heading here straight from work, it's apt that these early birds are treated to the sort of rebellious, high-voltage rock that makes you want to flip your desk. But while the trio are 25-year road veterans, they struggle to leave a lasting impression in a fast 30 minutes. It doesn't help that John Calabrese's bass keeps making the most horrific sound – a harsh, sonorous swelling that seems to peak and fade on a loop. Still touring in support of 2021's well-received *Power Trio*, the band's fiery endeavour is abundant – and *Full Of Regret* is admittedly a banger – but something doesn't quite click for the Canadians tonight.

The Darkness's Justin Hawkins is as bemused as everyone else that their barnstorming debut album *Permission To Land* turns 20 later this year. Clearly in a celebratory mood, they stick 70 per cent of it in tonight's set – also because these songs still bang like hell. Just the other night in Liverpool, after opener *Growing On Me* the venue was evacuated due to stage equipment catching fire. Not to be deterred, however, the pyrotechnics remain plentiful this evening.

Black Shuck's riff-happy stomp is irresistible, and *One Way Ticket* is as good as rock in four-four gets – concert panto developed over many years, bassist Frankie Poullain's cowbell count-in is more like a shamanic ritual these days. Drummer Rufus Taylor drives *Heart Explodes* with his beefy chops – his snare drum unleashing a colossal thwack – before the band briefly become a quintet. A teenager at the front holds up a sign requesting to get up and play the drums, with it being his birthday. Hilariously, Hawkins denies him, leaping to Taylor's defence, but eventually offers him a consolatory cowbell spot on *Japanese Prisoner Of Love*. "Get t' cowbell for t' lad," Hawkins says, in an impressively convincing Yorkshire accent. Still, some birthday for the young man.



Permission to entertain: Justin Hawkins and (left, top) Frankie Poullain light up The Darkness.

A few weeks into 2023, we could all do with a bit of Hawkins's cast-iron, cocksure energy on *Solid Gold*. '*We're immortal, cos our songs will never die/And we're never gonna stop shitting out solid gold.*' he sings. Not that Angus Young has much cause for riff envy, but in another dimension this would make a cracking AC/DC number, its bottom-heavy strut more than ideal for duck-walking. At least until Hawkins brings out his trusty keytar for a timely injection of camp. This is The Darkness's first UK headline arena tour since 2006, and arguably they've never sounded better.

Seven albums in, Black Stone Cherry have hit that career sweet spot where every show is effectively a greatest hits set, such is the catalogue they have at their disposal. "Let's take these fine folks on down to *Soulcreek*, baby!" frontman Chris Robertson proposes in his Kentucky drawl, before launching into the 2008 song's winding, bluesy licks.

With *Blind Man*, you get the impression that powerhouse drummer John Fred Young would rather spontaneously combust than play his drum parts the same as on record – with supreme Bonzo vibes, his off-kilter fills are flung around with utter abandon. Not that he ever loses control, despite letting a few sticks slip. Were he to somehow set up his kit and play alone on the Moon, he'd no doubt perform with the same, endearing vigour.

Having replaced founding bass player Jon Lawhon in 2021, it's to Steve Jewell's credit that it already feels like he's been in the band for years. He seems to have excellent chemistry with his bandmates, particularly guitarist and resident whirling dervish Ben Wells, and makes his mark on rumbling new single *Out Of Pocket*. When Wells isn't flying across the stage doing scissor kicks, he's headbanging like it's going out of fashion; he must know an outstanding osteopath.

Leeds apparently adores *Blame It On The Boom Boom*, with the love-it-or-hate-it, less-than-cryptic appraisal of wide-ranging dalliances getting the loudest response of the night. The moment Wells starts chugging through *Lonely Train*'s stop-start, locomotive riff, you're transported back to that gloomy New Orleans warehouse from the band's debut music video. Sixteen years on, Black Stone Cherry are no longer that moody, unknown proposition, but their signature song is still as explosive and anthemic as it ever was. Similarly explosive is the thrashy jam they hurl themselves into before the chorus's reprise. Southern-fried Slayer, anyone? "Leeds, you were fucking amazing!" Robertson shouts, before slinking off pre-encore.

Closing with a cover is often high-risk, low-reward, but BSC pull off their take on ELO's *Don't Bring Me Down* (included on previous album *The Human Condition*) with aplomb, with Wells's seriously crispy lead breaks adding colour to the song's low-end fuzz. Like all good covers, if for only a moment, its original architect is forgotten.

Given that it's a Friday night, it does feels like a trick is missed when the two main attractions don't play their respective tributes to the occasion – neither Black Stone Cherry's Kentucky-flavoured *Southern Fried Friday Night* nor The Darkness's distinctly more forthright *Friday Night* get an airing.

So-called 'arena rock' will always have its critics, but when it's done as masterfully as this, and with just the right amount of spectacle, there's no greater setting. As the old guard bow out, rock needs as many bands like The Darkness and Black Stone Cherry that it can get.

Words: ***Chris Lord*** *Photos:* ***Sabrina Ramdoyal***

SPARKS
2023
MAY 23 OXFORD NEW THEATRE
MAY 24 LIVERPOOL PHILHARMONIC HALL SOLD OUT
MAY 26 GLASGOW SEC ARMADILLO
MAY 27 MANCHESTER BRIDGEWATER HALL SOLD OUT
MAY 29 LONDON ROYAL ALBERT HALL
MAY 30 LONDON ROYAL ALBERT HALL
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WED 11 GLASGOW ROYAL CONCERT HALL
FRI 13 YORK BARBICAN
SAT 14 SAGE GATESHEAD
SUN 15 SALFORD THE LOWRY
MON 16 SHEFFIELD CITY HALL
WED 18 LEICESTER DE MONTFORT HALL
THU 19 CROYDON FAIRFIELD HALL
FRI 20 PORTSMOUTH KINGS THEATRE
SAT 21 CARDIFF ST. DAVID'S HALL
MON 23 GUILDFORD G LIVE
TUE 24 BRIGHTON DOME
THU 26 BATH THE FORUM
FRI 27 BOURNEMOUTH PAVILION THEATRE
SAT 28 OXFORD NEW THEATRE
MON 30 SOUTHEND CLIFFS PAVILION
TUE 31 READING THE HEXAGON
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'Everything cranked up beyond 11 and played with a punk fervour.'

Dropkick Murphys
Wembley OVO Arena

Middle finger raised high.

Would Woody have done it this way? Eighty years after Woody Guthrie extolled the spirit of the working man in songs that are now regarded as traditional folk, Dropkick Murphys from Massachussets, whose latest album features songs with a bunch of previously unpublished Guthrie lyrics, hurl that spirit at a seething mosh pit in Wembley Arena.

Whereas Guthrie just had a battered acoustic guitar with a "This machine kills fascists" sticker, Dropkick Murphys have guitars, banjos, pipes, accordions and drums, everything cranked up beyond 11 and played with a punk fervour, the accordion player risking a broken neck with his exertions.

When he isn't pacing the stage restlessly, singer Ken Casey is perched precariously on the barrier in front of the moshers, grasping the outstretched hands for balance. At one point he grabs a passing crowd surfer and sings with her for a couple of minutes before throwing her back into the throng. He also conducts the masses for the chorus of *All You Fonies*, the band's adaptation of Guthrie's *All You Fascists Bound To Lose*. They know precisely who the 'fonies' are, as he'd dedicated a song to the striking railway workers, nurses and ambulance workers earlier.

Answer: yes, Woody would have. Although some of his more earnest 50s and 60s disciples might have blanched.

Hugh Fielder

Dropkick Murphys' Ken Casey: like the instruments, cranked up to 11.

Wingmen
Brighton Concorde 2

Punk supergroup are on target at debut tour's last show.

Taking the stage to the strains of perennial war-movie favourite *633 Squadron*, Wingmen – singer-guitarist Baz Warne (The Stranglers), guitarist Leigh Heggarty (Ruts DC), bassist Paul Gray (The Damned), drummer Marty Love (Johnny Moped) and keyboard player Rob Coombes (Supergrass) – waste little time in dropping their own payload from a very great height. And for a band that formed during lockdown and recorded their debut remotely without even meeting, what becomes immediately apparent is that the chemistry between the players is not only palpable, it's also intoxicating.

This is the final night of their nine-date inaugural tour, and while the mood is one of celebration, there's no denying Wingmen's sense of purpose. Their ire is aimed at – among others - Brexiters (*Oh! What A Carry On*), the declining state of the NHS (*I Would If I Could*) and endless moaners (*Brits*). Non-album song *Don't Look Back* snarls like a caged dog and augers well for their future.

As evidenced by covers of David Bowie's *Hang On To Yourself* and Iggy And The Stooges' *I Got A Right*, Heggarty's slide guitar skills are in full force, and the addition of Coombes's keyboards bolster and thicken the sound.

"It's not a bad band, is it?" asks Baz Warne. No mate, it's not. Here's to their return in the autumn.

Julian Marszalek

Red Hot Chili Peppers / Post Malone
Dunedin Forsyth Barr Stadium, New Zealand

Something for everyone at the Chilis' most southerly stadium show.

Resplendent in denim shorts and souvenir T-shirt from the Hobbiton movie set, Post Malone spends the best part of an hour delivering an autotuned vocal to a backing track, tottering around happily like a sozzled bride. Yet he exudes so much charm he's almost impossible to dislike, especially when he gleefully smashes an acoustic guitar then personally delivers the shrapnel to the front row. You can see why Ozzy likes him so much.

Once the screaming has died down, the Chili Peppers arrive to entertain the older patrons, and once they've sorted out the levels – the band initially sound like a coalition of competing fairground rides – it's electrifying stuff. Unlike many stadium acts, they don't perform in different postcodes, and for much of the set you could throw a blanket over the quartet. *Fake As F@ck* is dramatic, *Tippa My Tongue* lascivious, *These Are The Ways* magical. John Frusciante and Flea spend much of the set facing off, and the former's solo during *Snow (Say Oh)* is genuinely breathtaking. And at the end, the rapturous reception afforded encores *Under The Bridge* and *Give It Away* is exceeded only by the roar that greets the announcement that Flea will leave the band after the show to become New Zealand Prime Minister.

Fraser Lewry

Laurence Jones
Sevenoaks Stag Theatre

Life as a thirty-something is treating the guitar hero well.

English blues guitarist, singer and songwriter Laurence Jones has been touring for so long that it's hard to believe he's now 30 years old. With age comes wisdom, and the once pimply teenager with a mantelpiece creaking under the weight of blues awards now sports floppy hair, facial stubble and a swish jacket à la 1990s Eric Clapton.

The Stag is comfortably full, and three nights into this tour with a new power-trio line-up, Jones knows exactly what he is doing. Unlike so many of his counterparts, every song is not simply an excuse for a guitar solo (although of course there are plenty of those), something espoused with growing validity on his most recent couple of albums. The chorus-friendly *Give Me That Feeling* and *Stop Moving The House*, a fun 12-bar belter that Francis Rossi jokingly claimed the youngster had "robbed" when Jones opened for Status Quo last year, are among the moments that point the way forward, but how refreshing that a fairly noisy Saturday-night audience stops its chatter to listen in respectful silence to the show's only 'pure blues' moment, the emotive slow-burner and new single *Thunder In The Sky*, which reminds us exactly why he won all of those statues. A clever adaptation of Hendrix's *Purple Haze* also suggests that Jones is willing to play the crowd-pleasing game, but only on his own terms.

Dave Ling

GETTY

The Soundtrack Of My Life

Steel Panther guitarist ***Satchel*** on the records, artists and gigs that are of lasting significance to him.

Interview: **Henry Yates**

On their 2009 debut album *Feel The Steel*, LA parody-metallers Steel Panther prowled into contention with a fistful of Sunset Strip riffs and #MeToo-baiting tales of Asian hookers and oral sex. Six albums later, the joke still hasn't worn thin, thanks to the band's deadly serious musicianship and, as guitarist Satchel reminds us, an appreciation for the giants of metal.

THE FIRST MUSIC I REMEMBER HEARING

My parents didn't crank up music around the house. I got turned on to music by friends who had older brothers that were not afraid to smoke pot in front of them. They would say: "Hey, go into the closet, turn all the lights off and listen to *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath*." So we would listen to Black Sabbath in the closet until we got so scared we would run out.

THE FIRST SONG I PERFORMED LIVE

We got into devil music early on. But ironically, my first gig was at a church. The first one would have been a Stryper song. I remember nobody listening and everybody saying: "What is this racket?" But we turned it up as loud as we could and that became the whole goal, just to be as loud as possible.

THE GREATEST ALBUM OF ALL TIME

I'm gonna go with Queensrÿche's *Operation: Mindcrime*. You can drive and make love to that album at the same time. And I highly recommend it. Make sure that it's a girl, though, not an animal, because animals get crazy in the car.

MY ADOLESCENT ALBUM

When I put on *Screaming For Vengeance*, that'll bring me back to the eighties. I was a rebellious teenager. I was not only looking to fuck every girl in my neighbourhood and school, but I probably fucked all of the fur coats in my mom's closet and every pair of socks in my sock drawer.

THE GUITAR HERO

Ritchie Blackmore had so many great songs and his solos were ridiculous. *Man On The Silver Mountain. Since You Been Gone. Pictures Of Home.* Even the ones you hear all the time, like *Highway Star*. Everybody covers that one, but it's still awesome.

THE SINGER

Dio is definitely at the top somewhere. I love everything on *Mob Rules* and *Holy Diver. Invisible, Straight Through The Heart, Don't Talk To Strangers*…. Dio never phoned it in. Like Rob Halford, he could scream and hit amazing stuff up high, but they both had this really delicate voice that was just beautiful.

THE SONGWRITER

There are certain bands I love where you know there was a primary songwriter. Then there's bands like Led Zeppelin where I know Jimmy Page wrote a lot of the stuff but the contributions by the other guys were undeniable. It would never have sounded the same without what John Bonham, Robert Plant and John Paul Jones did. So many good songwriters in that band. Hearing *Led Zeppelin II* really affected me.

THE WORST MUSIC I'VE EVER HEARD

Recently we went to Japan and I had a day to kill. I was trapped in my hotel room and somebody told me (South Korean boy band) BTS had sold out the Raiders stadium where I live in Vegas. I was like: "No fucking way can this be happening – and why?" I had to figure it out. So I listened to two songs. It was the worst fucking shit I've ever heard in my life.

THE ALBUM THAT TAUGHT ME GUITAR

I started off with AC/DC – *Highway To Hell* and *Back In Black* – because it seemed easier. It didn't dawn on me until later that AC/DC's stuff sounds simple but playing it good is a whole other thing. Malcolm Young had more influence on guitar players than anybody else on the planet. Especially when you think about how little attention he got. He just hung out by the drums back there, just killing it.

THE MOST UNDERRATED BAND EVER

Steel Panther. We are definitely the hardest-working band out there and we don't get nearly as much pussy as we should. We get a lot of pussy, but we should be getting all the pussy.

THE RIFF THAT STARTED IT ALL

Before I got into learning guitar, I remember hearing *Smoke On The Water*. That's such an awesome riff but it wasn't until later that I realised it was Ritchie Blackmore and Jon Lord together that made it sound so big.

MY 'IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE' SONG

You can't go wrong with Motown. You know, Marvin Gaye – you put that on and girls go: "Oh, it's time to have sex." I put on Marvin Gaye the other day when my mom was over, and she started taking her clothes off, and I'm like, "Mom…!"

THE BEST LIVE ALBUM

Maiden Japan was one of the first cassettes I ever bought as a kid. The playing is great. The singing is great. One thing I've noticed about going to see Iron Maiden is that everybody sings along because the songs are so great – but nobody can hit the high choruses. Bruce points the mic at the crowd, but everybody kinda points back at him and goes: "I can't do that!"

THE SONG I WANT PLAYED AT MY FUNERAL

I'd like to have Steel Panther songs played at my funeral, because they're pretty lighthearted and I don't want to have a depressing funeral. So I hope they play *Gloryhole* really loud.

Steel Panther's On The Prowl is out now. The band's UK tour begins on May 14. Visit steelpantherrocks.com for details.

"Dio could scream, but also had this really delicate voice that was just beautiful."

DIO: GENE KIRKLAND/PRESS

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